



ANGER AT MBEKI'S "NO CRISIS" COMMENT COMMENT

South African leader's attempt to play honest broker undermined by his support for Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, analysts say.

By Joseph Sithole in Harare

Zimbabweans calling for the release of the long-delayed result of the presidential election have voiced anger and disappointment at South African president Thabo Mbeki's statement that there is no crisis in their country.

The South African leader, who has always claimed that his policy of "quiet diplomacy" is the most effective way of dealing with Zimbabwe and who played the role of mediator in talks between the ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition ahead of the March 29 elections, made the remark after meeting President Robert Mugabe in Harare on April 12.



Credit: Lazele

South Africa president Thabo Mbeki (right) at State House during his mediation effort. Picture taken November 22, 2007.

The following day, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, announced a recount in 23 constituencies for all four elections — to the presidency, the upper and lower houses of parliament and local councils.

The opposition fears this means the still-unannounced result of the presidential ballot will be altered in Mugabe's favour, and insists its candidate Morgan Tsvangirai has won outright.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- On April 12, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, said it was holding a recount in 23 constituencies for all the elections held on March 29. There are fears this could result in Robert Mugabe being declared the winner in the presidential ballot, and reverse the victory won by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, in the parliamentary poll.
- The MDC called a general strike for April 15 after the High Court turned down its appeal to force the ZEC to announce the result of the presidential election. Early reports in the media suggested the strike was not widely supported, while police maintained a heavy presence in central Harare.
- President Robert Mugabe boycotted the April 12 emergency summit called by the Southern African Development Community, SADC. When the meeting was called, SADC members had expressed concern at the delay in releasing the poll results. The final communique issued after the meeting was not, however, strongly worded.
- South African president Thabo Mbeki saw Mugabe in Harare on his way to the meeting, and caused some consternation by saying that what was happening in Zimbabwe was not a crisis but a "normal political process".
- The French news agency AFP reported on April 16 that humanitarian aid programmes were suffering because of the current political crisis. It quoted major aid agencies as saying they had cut back activities on the ground because the situation was so sensitive. One unnamed group cited reports of intimidation, noting that non-government organisations were viewed by Mugabe supporters as sympathetic to the opposition.

Election officials continue to refuse to declare a winner. On April 14 the opposition called a general strike for the following day after losing a High Court bid to force the ZEC to announce the result of the vote.

The recount could also affect the distribution of seats in the lower chamber of parliament, the House of Assembly. As things stand, the main faction of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, has 99 seats, ahead of the 97 won by ZANU-PF. The smaller MDC faction led by Arthur Mutambara managed to win ten seats, potentially giving the opposition 109 seats if it teams up with Tsvangirai's people on legislation.

“It is a normal election process” — South African president Thabo Mbeki.

When the Southern African Development Community, SADC, a regional grouping in which South Africa is a key player, held an emergency summit in Zambia on April 12, many Zimbabweans expected it to issue a categorical demand for the ZEC to release the presidential result.

Mugabe clearly believed the same thing — he refused to attend, for the first time since taking power 28 years ago.

Earlier in the week, SADC members had expressed concern at the delay in releasing the poll results.

The Zimbabwean leader need not have worried, though. The communiqué released after the emergency meeting contained a feeble appeal to the country's political leaders “to embark with humility and seize the opportunity to turn over a new leaf in their beloved country”.

Mbeki set the tone of the meeting when he dropped into Harare and met Mugabe en route to Zambia.

Suggesting that the only real problem was the lack of a clear winner, and that this would require a second, run-off presidential election, he told reporters, “I would not describe that as a crisis. It is a normal election process, according to the laws of Zimbabwe.”

Mbeki's comments were in sharp contrast to a more robust statement made by the SADC's chairman, Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa, when he called the summit last week.

Mwanawasa said the regional grouping could not turn a blind eye when “one of its members is experiencing political pain”.

He noted that everyone was still “in the dark” about who won the presidential election, adding, “Our concern in the SADC region is that the failure on behalf of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to announce the results of the presidential election has given rise to a climate of tension in the country.”

“It is shocking that Mbeki can say such a thing... These are elementary issues that Mbeki should be alive to, and yet he sees no crisis” — Zimbabwean journalist.

A veteran Zimbabwean journalist in Harare said he was “shocked” by Mbeki's comments that there was no crisis, at a time when there has officially been no government in charge almost three weeks after the elections. As required by law, Mugabe dismissed the cabinet ahead of the election, although he has since recalled his ministers in move his opponents regard as illegal.

“Given the current climate of fear and anxiety, it is shocking that Mbeki can say such a thing. In the normal course of things, a new president should have been sworn in, or the old one sworn in if he had won,” said the journalist.

“What we have is a president... now continuing to rule by decree because there is no cabinet and there is no parliament. These are elementary issues that Mbeki should be alive to, and yet he sees no crisis. Does a crisis necessarily mean dead bodies on the streets as happened in Kenya?”

A political analyst, who also did not want to be named, expressed similar concerns that Zimbabwe could descend into the kind of violence that erupted in Kenya over the New Year following a disputed presidential election.

“What was the whole point of this election if people are not told how they voted?” — research analyst.

“Mbeki is clearly not telling the full story about what is happening in the country,” he said. “There can be a serious crisis in a country without people being slaughtered. Zimbabweans have so far rejected the Kenyan model because they believe the international community can help. But for how long can a people restrain themselves when the political situation continues to deteriorate?”

He claimed it was hypocritical of Mbeki to say there was no crisis when his own government was deporting hundreds of Zimbabwean economic and political refugees from South Africa every month.

The analyst suggested that the SADC's hesitation about taking a tougher line with Zimbabwe stemmed from a desire to somehow contain the crisis at a southern African regional level.

He said that members of the grouping feared that if the political stalemate were to be formally defined as a “crisis”, it would need to be taken up by the African Union's Council of Ministers and thereafter by the United Nations Security Council. That is

something African leaders have always resisted, because they do not want former colonial powers, notably Britain, to seize the initiative from them.

“The real trouble is that opinion is divided on what to do, because none of the countries in the region can take unilateral action against Mugabe,” said the analyst. “Legally, there is also nothing they can do — even as a group — except to rely on the goodwill of the member states. Unfortunately, Mugabe is proving not to be a neighbourly brother in his dealing with his comrades.”

Mbeki's latest comments have damaged his credibility with opponents of Mugabe.

“I think Mbeki is becoming part of the problem. He is now complicit in our crisis” — analyst.

“What does Mbeki mean by saying there is no crisis in Zimbabwe, three weeks after elections and there are no results?” said a senior researcher with a local think-tank. “Doesn't a denial of the results constitute a violation of the people's right to know? What was the whole point of this election if people are not told how they voted?”

Expressing a view now held by many, she said, “I think Mbeki is becoming part of the problem. He is now complicit in our crisis and is doing a major discredit to his so-called ‘quiet diplomacy’, which has perhaps compounded our crisis.”

She said there was now a need for the crisis to be acknowledged so as to open the way for intervention by the wider international community.

“So long as there is denial, there won't be any action,” she said.

Joseph Sithole is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

KEEPING THE MILITARY ON SIDE



Credit: Lazele

Zimbabwe Defence Forces chief Constantine Chiwenga at the national shrine in Harare, Picture taken July 2007.

Top brass pledges to back Mugabe to the end, but lower ranks seem less committed to defending a regime that cannot feed them.

By Yamikani Mwando in Bulawayo

As the impasse around Zimbabwe's presidential election continues, analysts say much now depends on which way the powerful security forces will jump if they are asked to prop up President Robert Mugabe.

For the moment, it seems defence and police chiefs will maintain their loyalty to the president and will do what it takes to keep him in power. But rank-and-file soldiers and police have suffered from the country's precipitous economic decline, and appear less willing to go on blindly supporting Mugabe.

With United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressing concern at

the country's post-election chaos, and the Southern African Development Community holding an emergency weekend meeting on the crisis on April 12, analysts are warning a “silent coup” is under way.

Over his 28 years in power, Mugabe has relied on the security forces to maintain grip on power, and now he may be planning to use them to effectively nullify the poll results.

Mugabe may be planning to use the security forces to maintain his grip in power.

In the March parliamentary election, official results show that the two factions of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, have wrested control of the lower chamber from Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, while the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, has stalled on releasing the outcome of the presidential vote held the same day.

MDC Morgan Tsvangirai, who insists he has won the presidential election, reportedly asked for a meeting with security and army officials to discuss the transitional arrangements for Mugabe leaving office. Prior to the election, defence chief Constantine Chiwenga, police chief Augustine Chihuri and penal service head Paradzayi Zimondi declared they would “not salute” a future president Tsvangirai.

The Zimbabwean leader enjoys wide support among the war veterans who act as a paramilitary force.

Mugabe himself has also had meetings with the security chiefs who sit on the Joint Operations Command, and with ZANU-PF’s ruling politburo. Senior politburo officials including Didymus Mutasa — in charge of the country’s intelligence services — are now said to have vowed to fight on in a run-off presidential election, despite the fact that no official poll results have been released.

As well as the regular forces, Mugabe enjoys wide support among militant veterans of the 1970s war of liberation, who form a de facto paramilitary reserve.

While security chiefs have declared their loyalty to the beleaguered Mugabe, rank-and-file servicemen appear to have their own ideas. Like civilians, they have lost out from years of economic chaos and mismanagement. Many soldiers now spend their time scrounging to feed their families.

Military officers who spoke to IWPR said they were not about to wield guns and batons against unarmed civilians. Such resistance to using force could hamper Mugabe’s efforts to deploy the armed forces to perpetuate his hold on power.

This week, a young professional soldier told IWPR that he was beaten up at a Bulawayo army base after being accused of supporting the MDC. The man, who has fled to South Africa and cannot be named for safety reasons, said the assault took place after he resigned from the army in early April and returned to barracks to hand in his uniform.

“I was locked up in a room, where I was thrashed all over my body and accused of attempting to abscond so that I could join Morgan Tsvangirai’s army,” he said, visibly shaken by what had happened. “After the beatings I was given a new uniform and told to return to work. That was when I decided I wasn’t staying any minute longer.”

“It has always been noted that there are divided loyalties within the Zimbabwean defence forces” — Zimbabwean academic.

Military experts say it is rare for a soldier to formally resign, but many simply desert and leave the country.

Although the army is supposed to have between 30,000 and 40,000 personnel, numbers have been falling as commissioned and non-commissioned officers abscond. The authorities have also scaled down recruitment, citing inadequate resources.

While the security forces might look monolithic from the outside, the armed forces contain more than one element — the Mugabe loyalists from the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, ZANLU, the armed wing of ZANU during the liberation war, and those originally from the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army, ZIPRA, affiliated with the late Joshua Nkomo’s ZAPU movement.

There is some suggestion the division lives on under the surface, making parts of the military more open to talking to the MDC than might be thought. According to a former lecturer at the National University of Science and Technology, it is significant that former ZIPRA officers have not joined colleagues in speaking out robustly in support of Mugabe.

“Sentiment across the security forces reflects disgruntlement with the system” — officer with the police force’s internal intelligence agency.

“It has always been noted that there are divided loyalties within the Zimbabwean defence forces, if you look at the actual role being played by [ex-ZIPRA] men who fought alongside Joshua Nkomo. Their silence on issues of allegiance to the powers that be can mean a lot of things,” said the lecturer.

He noted that while former ZAPU politicians now in government had aligned themselves publicly with the regime, “we don’t get the same from the ZIPRA generals now serving under Mugabe. Why?”

The political crisis appears to have compounded the morale problems facing the security forces.

Members of Police Internal Service Intelligence, PISI, told IWPR that they had been monitoring political activity both in the police force and in other security agencies, and morale had been low ever since the elections.

“We all know about the situation,” said one officer, who declined to be named. “We are equally suffering, and it is known by many within PISI that sentiment across the security forces reflects disgruntlement with the system.”

Yamikani Mwando is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

POST-MUGABE AID PACKAGE PLANNED

Analysts consider how foreign aid should be administered in the event of Mugabe being ousted.

By Erica Beinlich in London

If opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai emerges as the eventual winner of the drawn out battle for the Zimbabwean presidency, international donors will be ready to pour aid into the economically-ruined country.

But some experts warn donors to proceed with caution, arguing that merely throwing money at the country may do little to promote long-term economic stability.

"You've got to be very careful injecting huge sums of money into an economy," said Geoff Hill, a respected Zimbabwe analyst.

"It's like giving a four-course dinner to someone who hasn't eaten for a month. It's going to damage their stomach."

The Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, has already claimed victory in the presidential poll of March 29, which could mark the end of the 28-year reign of ZANU-PF president Robert Mugabe. However, the official results may not be released for more than a week, as the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission, ZEC, plans to hold recounts in 23 constituencies.

On April 14, the High Court turned down an MDC petition to make the results public immediately. The opposition party argued that delaying their publication was allowing ZANU-PF to widen its campaign of intimidation in rural areas.

In the event of Mugabe being ousted, the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and the World Bank, have already agreed a three-pronged approach for rebuilding Zimbabwe. This includes plans to restore stability to the



Credit: Lazele

Traders selling basic commodities that are no longer to be found in shops in Harare. The black market has taken over as the economy continues its free-fall. Picture taken April 3.

Zimbabwean dollar and curb the hyperinflation that has soared to a rate of over 100,000 per cent; and provide humanitarian aid to ease poverty and hunger and a land reform package to strengthen the once thriving farming sector.

Boosting agriculture is a top priority, as international donors believe Zimbabwe's current woes stem from Mugabe's ruinous land policies.

In 2000, the president seized farmland from white farmers and distributed it in smaller tracts to ZANU-PF supporters, without supplying them with the training or equipment to keep up production levels.

Agriculture, once a pillar of the Zimbabwean economy, rapidly declined, bringing the economy down with it. To counter spiralling inflation, the government started mass-producing currency, forcing inflation to highs surpassing even those in Germany following the First World War.

Britain has reportedly agreed to lead the funding of land reform, because of its former colonial ties with Zimbabwe.

Chris Maroleng, a researcher on Zimbabwe at the Institute for Security Studies, said the international community can assist farmers by providing them with support, equipment and training.

"They could help the farmers get access to things like fertiliser and tools to help till the land, and more importantly skills in order to enhance the agricultural production capacity," he said.

While it would be almost political suicide for Tsvangirai and the MDC to completely reverse Mugabe's land reforms, the new leadership will need to formulate a new land policy.

"They don't need to reverse everything Mugabe has done in terms of redistribution," said Ricardo Gottschalk from the Institute of Development Studies.

"Find a midway point that can meet the demands and needs both of the commercial farmers and the poor. It's difficult but we shouldn't put things in the terms of either/or."

At this stage, it is not clear whether the international aid planned for Zimbabwe comes with strings attached.

Some experts have suggested that imposing conditions could force Zimbabwe to embrace much-needed political, economic and governmental reforms. Such reforms would also reassure investors that ventures in the country are safe. Foreign investment is key to ensuring a sustainable economy after foreign aid stops flowing.

“If investment is to return to the country, there needs to be conditions tied to the aid to ensure the investments are secure; that political and governmental reforms are made,” said George Katito, a Zimbabwe analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

“A major way to do this would be showing there’s a new commitment to reversing poor government decisions made in the past.”

However, Katito warned that attaching conditions to aid could be interpreted by Zimbabweans as their government bowing to international demands. A desire to preserve national sovereignty is deeply embedded in the psyche of the country that won its independence in 1980.

“It could be misconstrued as international interference on issues that Zimbabweans think that their government should have local sovereignty over,” he said.

Gottschalk suggested that imposing rigid conditions on a new government was unnecessary.

“I don’t think [the international community] will need to become heavy handed [with] the new government to try to discipline it and make it follow economic politics. It’s quite obvious the government will be committed to restoring economic stability,” he said.

But many experts agree that foreign aid will only take the country so far.

“I think ultimately the most important thing for Zimbabweans is to create sustainable development,” said Maroleng. “But Zimbabweans must have the largest say in how Zimbabwe will be run, and more importantly, must play the biggest part in that recovery.”

Central to the reconstruction effort will be encouraging the sizeable diaspora to return to the country. An estimated quarter of the 13.3 million population has left Zimbabwe in the last eight years.

Not only will their skills contribute to development, the foreign currency they bring back could greatly boost the country’s economy.

“It’s important to bring some of the skilled people who have previously left Zimbabwe back to do these [development] projects,” said Hill.

“Don’t bring in outsiders from those countries giving the aid who are paid ridiculous salaries. At the same time, don’t just give a job to someone because they’re Zimbabwean — but at least give them a chance to compete for these jobs.”

Perhaps the greatest issue standing in the way of the expats returning is the ban on dual citizenship.

“People who have fought long and hard for US, British, or South African citizenship and have surrendered their Zimbabwean nationality will not give [their new status] up easily,” said Hill.

He pointed to countries such as Rwanda, which has reformed similarly rigid nationality laws to encourage expats to return to the country, while maintaining their new citizenship. “It’s critically important to allow dual nationality if you’re going to bring people back,” said Hill.

But he and other analysts believe it unlikely that Zimbabweans living outside the country would return en masse following a regime change, preferring to wait until the economy starts to turn around. “I think it’s going to be a long and hard ride and that’s why I think immigration won’t turn around immediately,” said Hill. “It’s not going to be at all easy, and some people will never come back.”

Erica Beinlich is an IWPR reporter in London. ■

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa’s Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratization and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components —

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