

# Mozambique and an African solution to the Zimbabwe stalemate

KAI THALER

Affiliated Researcher of IPRIS

In April, Zimbabwe marked thirty years of true independence, three decades since the end of white-minority rule of the state as Rhodesia. Unfortunately, it also marked thirty years of unbroken rule by President Robert Mugabe. The former hero of the liberation movement is today a dictator and a pariah, holding onto political power to the detriment of the country he helped create and the people he helped free. Despite international pressure and a nominal power-sharing agreement, Mugabe remains clearly in control in Zimbabwe. Since the mid-1990's, this has spelled disaster for Zimbabwe, with racial tensions flaring, the economy collapsing, and political freedoms brutally curtailed. The international community, with negotiations, limited sanctions and threats, has thus far failed to achieve any meaningful change in Zimbabwe. Efforts were initially based in the West, especially with the former colonial power, Britain, but beginning in 2008, South Africa took the lead, with equally fruitless results. Unfortunately, without a breakthrough soon, it appears that Zimbabwe with Mugabe, like Cuba with the Castro brothers, is doomed to suffer under dictatorship until death. However, this does not mean diplomatic efforts should cease. Instead, they should continue to focus on applying pressure to Mugabe, while also undertaking measures to ensure the health and safety of all

Zimbabweans. For this to be effective, the international community needs the cooperation of Zimbabwe's fellow members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Mozambique may in fact be the ideal candidate to lead such an effort, to succeed where others have failed.

In the early 1960's, Mugabe was the Secretary General of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), before spending a decade as a political prisoner of Ian Smith's white-led Rhodesian state. After being released, Mugabe made his way to Mozambique, where he assumed control of ZANU's military arm, leading guerrilla attacks against Rhodesia. The new government of Mozambique, freshly independent of Portuguese rule and led by the strongly anti-colonial *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo) welcomed the presence of ZANU guerrillas, along with providing support to the African National Congress (ANC) and South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in their struggles against apartheid South Africa. Mozambique also helped to support over 150,000 refugees who fled the conflict and oppressive white rule in Rhodesia.

Mozambique paid dearly for its solidarity with the Zimbabwean people, as the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization gathered together and supplied former set-



tlers and Frelimo outcasts to form the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Renamo). Seeking to undercut the ZANU insurgency and weaken the upstart, black-ruled, Marxist-Leninist Frelimo government, Rhodesian forces and Renamo began attacking ZANU bases and infrastructure within Mozambique. Renamo graduated to a more general campaign of destabilization and destruction, stunting development and cruelly killing and mutilating thousands of Mozambicans over the course of the ensuing civil war, which lasted until 1992.

The eventual triumph of Mugabe and ZANU, with the Lancaster House Agreement ending white rule and Mugabe's

election as Prime Minister in 1980, was similarly marred soon thereafter by civil war, this one pitting ZANU against the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). A war of attrition simmered between the two parties, finally ending with the groups' merger and the formation of Zimbabwe's current ruling party, ZANU-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), in 1987. At this time, Mugabe solidified his already strong control of the government by abolishing the office of Prime Minister and assuming the office of President, expanding his powers in the process.

Until the early 1990's, Zimbabwe achieved remarkable success in the health and education sectors, but economic growth lagged, leading to structural reforms under the guidance of the Bretton Woods institutions. While the large-scale agricultural and manufacturing sectors (and their mainly white or ZANU-PF crony proprietors) benefited from the reforms, most Zimbabweans, as smallholder farmers or involved in small enterprises, saw their lot worsen. Social services were cut and political tensions began to build.

In 2000, a referendum was held on constitutional amendments proposed by ZANU-PF to impose term limits on future presidents (though leaving Mugabe free to continue in office), establish legal immunity for government and security officials, and allow the government to seize white-owned land for redistribution to blacks without compensation. The referendum failed, so Mugabe responded by following the standard authoritarian playbook

and sending out the thugs. Armed men, some of them veterans of the liberation war (though all were presented as such) began invading white-owned farms and evicting the owners, killing and abusing those who resisted. To legitimize these actions, the Parliament quickly passed a barely-revised version of the rejected amendment permitting land seizures.

Zimbabwe has since spiraled downwards. The economy collapsed, and until its adoption of the US dollar in 2009, Zimbabwe suffered from hyperinflation, with millions of Zimbabwean dollars being worth next to nothing, despite multiple rounds of revaluation. Foreign investors have

avoided the country, and much of Zimbabwe's white population, with its technical expertise, has fled. Thus a country that was once a net exporter of food to the rest of Africa has become dependent on handouts from the World Food Program, facing dire famines. Mugabe has constantly remained intransigent in the face of international criticism over farm seizures, the failure to meet the needs of a starving populace, and his own increasingly autocratic and kleptocratic rule.

Mugabe successfully fended off political attempts to challenge his leadership by using intimidation, repression and electoral fraud to maintain control. However, the situation finally boiled over in 2008. In that year's parliamentary elections, ZANU-PF for the first time lost the majority of seats, which were won by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In spite of a campaign

of violent intimidation against the MDC before the presidential election, Mugabe lost the first round of voting to formerly-imprisoned MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai. Tsvangirai did not officially receive an absolute majority of votes, though, so a runoff election was mandated. After initially agreeing to take part in the runoff, Tsvangirai pulled out after violence against his supporters continued, considering it a foregone conclusion that the runoff would not be allowed to proceed in a free and fair manner. Amidst widespread fraud, Mugabe won an overwhelming percentage of the vote in the now effectively uncontested election.

Without a breakthrough soon, it appears that Zimbabwe with Mugabe, like Cuba with the Castro brothers, is doomed to suffer under dictatorship until death. However, this does not mean diplomatic efforts should cease. Instead, they should continue to focus on applying pressure to Mugabe, while also undertaking measures to ensure the health and safety of all Zimbabweans.



In response to Mugabe's brazen disregard of the democratic will and process, the European Union and United States have imposed travel and financial sanctions on Mugabe and other ZANU-PF government officials, in effect since 2002. The U.S. and U.K. have endeavored to freeze and seize Mugabe's foreign assets. However, Europe and the U.S. continue to trade with Zimbabwe to the tune of hundreds of millions of US dollars every year. While Mugabe may miss the visits he used to make to London, he is not personally suffering financially, and none of the measures has deterred Mugabe in his quest to remain an omnipotent President for Life. For once placating the international community in the wake of the 2008 election debacle, Mugabe entered into negotiations with the MDC leadership, mediated by South African President Thabo Mbeki under the auspices of SADC. These talks resulted in the signing of a power-sharing agreement to make Tsvangirai Prime Minister and bring the MDC into the cabinet. Violence against the opposition has continued, though, and despite Tsvangirai's power on paper, there is no real question that Mugabe is still in charge in Zimbabwe.

Since 2008, there has been continued wrangling between ZANU-PF and the MDC, with the latter party splitting into two factions. Current South African President Jacob Zuma has assumed the role of chief mediator for SADC and has been a frequent presence in negotiations, but progress has been elusive. Agreements have been reached on electoral reforms and a number of smaller issues, but more important and pressing issues, such as cabinet appointments and land reform compensation, remain unresolved. At an independence celebration rally this year, Mugabe issued a call for peace, which on the surface is promising: "The leadership of the inclusive government urges you to desist from any acts of violence that will cause harm to others and become a blight to our society. As Zimbabweans, we need to foster an environment of tolerance and treating each other with dignity and respect irrespective of age, gender, race, ethnicity, tribe, political or religious affiliation". Given Mugabe's track record of repression, both the "inclusivity" of the

government and his commitment to non-violence are dubious. The true test will come in 2011, when elections are expected to be held.

It may be difficult to maintain pressure on Mugabe to hold him to his word. Zuma is currently distracted by discord within his ANC party, and racial tensions in South Africa have risen once again. This is due in no small part to inflammatory ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, who has undermined Zuma by visiting Zimbabwe at the invitation of the ZANU-PF and making statements attacking the MDC, as well as proposing the initiation of Zimbabwe-style seizures of white-owned land in South Africa. The approaching football World Cup will also draw

Zuma's, and the world's, attention away from Zimbabwe. Zuma has also failed in the past to hold Mugabe accountable for failure to fulfill his commitments the power-sharing agreement and, according to a recent commentary by Briggs Bomba and William Minter, Zuma "has even undermined his own diplomacy by echoing the talking points of Robert Mugabe".

Western diplomatic efforts and sanctions in the past have not pried any meaningful concessions from Mugabe, either. Mugabe and his supporters present such restrictions as imperialist meddling, an attempt by the West to continue to make Zimbabwe suffer even after it has thrown off the yoke of colonialism. Recently, in an interview with *The Guardian*, Graça Machel, the wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela and the former First Lady of Mozambique, admonished Britain for being patron-

izing in its relations with its former colonies and told it to leave the Zimbabwe issue alone. "The more the British shout, the worse the situation will be in terms of relationship with Zimbabwe. That's why sometimes I really question, when something happens in Zimbabwe and Britain shouts immediately", said Machel. "Can't they just keep quiet? Sometimes you need just to keep quiet. Let them do their own things, let SADC deal with them, but keep quiet, because the more you shout, the worse [it is]".

While colonialism inflicted terrible suffering in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, and American imperialism has done much of the same, Machel's arguments echo those of ZANU-PF and are a defensive reaction; British inaction

Thus a country that was once a net exporter of food to the rest of Africa has become dependent on handouts from the World Food Program, facing dire famines. Mugabe has constantly remained intransigent in the face of international criticism over farm seizures, the failure to meet the needs of a starving populace, and his own increasingly autocratic and kleptocratic rule.



is suggested in order to maintain the status quo in Zimbabwe, rather than presenting any constructive vision for the future. It would certainly be preferable for Zuma to curb Mugabe's power and bring ZANU-PF and the MDC together in a functioning, peaceful democratic government without any outside intervention. However, this has not come to fruition. Meanwhile, MDC members continue to be harassed, the Zimbabwean people continue to starve, and ZANU-PF's latest plan for the nationalization of companies promises to further destroy the economy and fill the pockets of party cronies. In the face of this ongoing and potentially worsening disaster, a new voice is needed in the mediation of Zimbabwe's problems, one that can help break the deadlock and South African and Western ineffectiveness.

Mozambique, Machel's native country, may have a unique ability to fill this role. Mugabe has shown himself unwilling to countenance any Western impositions upon him, and only slightly more willing to yield to pressure from South Africa's leaders. Mugabe and ZANU-PF are historically indebted, though, to Mozambique and the Frelimo-led government for the provision of bases and support during the guerrilla struggle against Rhodesia. This gives Mozambique increased legitimacy in pressuring Mugabe, forestalling accusations of imperialist motivations.

Compared to the current climate of political turmoil in South Africa, Mozambique enjoys domestic stability. There have been some disputes over alleged electoral irregularities, but for the most part, Mozambique's democracy is secure. It has also been enjoying economic growth and development, with an annual growth rate of about 5% and low inflation, making surprisingly good progress in its recovery from the devastation of the civil war. The strengthening of the Mozambican economy means that the country now has more to offer to Zimbabwe as a trading partner; additionally, Mozambique may return to its traditional role as a gateway for Zimbabwean goods to reach the sea via the Beira railway (which was

guarded by Zimbabwean troops during the Mozambican civil war). As Zimbabwe's economy has slumped, so too have the fortunes of the city of Beira, so it is in Mozambique's interest to help stabilize Zimbabwe and to build a government in its neighboring country that will be able to achieve responsible growth. Mozambique's own agricultural sector is not yet developed enough to significantly help offset the food disaster in Zimbabwe, but it has great potential as a transport and energy partner for Zimbabwe. Improvements in Zimbabwe would also help lessen

the flow of refugees from that country to Mozambique and South Africa, reducing the potential for further outbreaks of the xenophobic violence that erupted in South Africa in 2008.

Mozambique's domestic economic and political stability has enabled it to begin taking a more active role in international affairs, especially within SADC. The last round of ZANU-PF and MDC negotiations took place in Maputo and former President Joaquim Chissano has been the lead SADC negotiator in the talks to resolve Madagascar's similarly intractable political crisis. Mozambique is also likely to have a growing role to play in the coming years in combating the maritime piracy that is spreading south from Somalia to the Mozambique Channel.

However, Mozambique has had some difficulties asserting itself diplomatically, even within SADC. Zimbabwe was recently elected to the presidency of SADC's tourism council, the Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa, over Mozambique's candidacy, despite its barely existent tourism industry.

The only vote for Mozambique came from Angola, suggesting there may be a divide between the Lusophone countries and their Anglophone peers. Speaking out more forcefully on the crisis in Zimbabwe could antagonize other SADC countries by highlighting their failures in pressuring Mugabe, but it could also spur the body to revitalized action on the issue. It would also increase Mozambique's standing among Western countries frustrated by what they perceive as the complacency of other African countries on the issue of Zimbabwe.

The U.S. and U.K. have endeavored to freeze and seize Mugabe's foreign assets. However, Europe and the U.S. continue to trade with Zimbabwe to the tune of hundreds of millions of US dollars every year. While Mugabe may miss the visits he used to make to London, he is not personally suffering financially, and none of the measures has deterred Mugabe in his quest to remain an omnipotent President for Life.



Zimbabwe's political situation has been festering for more than a decade now. The country has been plunged into violence, dire poverty and starvation. So long as Robert Mugabe remains at the helm of the government, this seems unlikely to change. Western and South African attempts at mediation and coercive measures to achieve progress have been unsuccessful. While many African nations have their own problems to attend to and are also unwilling to challenge a man in Mugabe who is still

viewed as an anti-colonial liberation hero, it is in Mozambique's immediate economic interests to push Zimbabwe toward greater economic and political stability. This may also bring Mozambique political dividends by proving its diplomatic abilities and accomplishing what Western countries have desired but failed to do. Mozambican action on Zimbabwe can provide an African solution to an African problem, asserting independence and benefitting both countries.

**EDITOR** | Paulo Gorjão  
**ASSISTANT EDITOR** | Kai Thaler  
**DESIGN** | Atelier Teresa Cardoso Bastos

Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)  
Rua Vitorino Nemésio, 5 - 1750-306 Lisboa  
PORTUGAL

<http://www.ipris.org>  
email: [ipris@ipris.org](mailto:ipris@ipris.org)

IPRIS Viewpoints is a publication of IPRIS.  
The opinions expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IPRIS.