

Prospects for Political Transition in Zimbabwe

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Executive Summary

Recent statements by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe indicating that he might be contemplating retirement have revived speculation about the preconditions he would consider essential to guarantee his personal safety after leaving office. More broadly, there is increasing debate about the possible shape of a post-Mugabe dispensation, and how a new government might begin to tackle the serious economic and political difficulties facing the country.

Even members of Zimbabwe's ruling establishment now commonly accept that the formal economy is in a state of near collapse. Whatever their publicly-stated positions, leading figures in ZANU-PF admit that a return to international respectability and the resumption of aid and loan flows are urgently needed if a complete economic meltdown is to be averted. There are, however, some dissenting voices about the way Zimbabwe should handle its future relations with the World Bank, IMF and donor community, and these represent a significant faction across the formal political divide. The views of these intellectuals will have to be considered even as the international community attempts to ease Zimbabwe out of its political and economic impasse.

In the short term, it appears that the economic crisis has affected the domestic political balance of power in a number of ways. First, its effect on the living standards of the vast majority of Zimbabweans has created a groundswell of support for opponents of the current government, whose mismanagement and corruption are seen to be at the heart of the problem. Much of this discontent is manifested through the support given to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). There must obviously be a question about the viability of the MDC in a ZANU-PF dominated, post-Mugabe dispensation, especially if the international community does help alleviate the economic crisis in the aftermath of an "acceptable" political settlement. This systemic vulnerability of the MDC will obviously be a consideration in the minds of the various actors as they seek a solution favourable to their own interests.

One of the more interesting aspects of the economic crisis has been the number of opportunities it has created for the well connected to accumulate substantial fortunes, either by rent seeking, currency speculation, smuggling or the acquisition of capital

assets at bargain prices. There are, however, indications that such opportunities are diminishing, and the inward flow of foreign exchange is now drying up as currency brokers relocate their activities abroad. This, and the restricting sanctions that have caused some discomfort to many of the elite, makes it difficult for the new rich to enjoy the benefits of their wealth. Thus, within ZANU-PF itself there is a substantial faction whose business interests push them to contemplate ways in which to reverse the rapid economic decline.

Other elements in the ruling party realize that their own chances of privileged survival in a post-Mugabe environment are slender. These individuals will probably continue to persuade Mugabe that he should prolong his stay in office, ignoring or suppressing those "evil counsellors" whose own ambition is cloaked in expressions of patriotic concern. This hard-line faction will continue to urge the suppression of the opposition, within and outside the ruling party.

Another faction within ZANU-PF recognizes that its chances of securing the presidential succession, and thus control of the patronage network of the state, are minimal unless some kind of agreement is reached with the opposition to allow for an amendment to the constitution. Such an agreement would ease the eradication of the constitutional requirement for a new presidential election to be held within 90 days of the incumbent leaving office. Only a negotiated exit could pave the way to power for the Speaker, Emmerson Mnangagwa, whose chances of winning the party's presidential nomination in an open contest, and subsequently securing the presidency in an internationally monitored election, may be discounted.

Some rival groups within the party want to avoid Mnangagwa's accession at virtually any cost. They will either try to discredit the negotiations with the MDC, or open their own talks *sub rosa*. One of these groups is seen to be centred on the *eminence grise*, Solomon Mujuru, and there is some debate as to the extent of its influence within the security establishment. The security forces have been fractured into professional, political, and irregular wings, and there can be no certainty that they have a coherent political position, not least because the members of the formal security forces have seen their families' economic positions eroded along with those of the rest of the population.

Apart from these groupings within ZANU-PF there are also a number of opportunists who lack defined constituencies. They will tend to defend the status quo until they see change as being unavoidable, at which point they will position themselves to best advantage.

In order to facilitate the discussion of these topics, the African Security Analysis Programme at the Institute for Security Studies invited a small group of observers and analysts from Zimbabwe and South Africa to participate in a roundtable discussion on 14 May 2003.

Deliberations and Conclusions of the Round Table

The delegates at the round table discussion generally agreed that Zimbabwe was in a state of unprecedented crisis. There may have been differences in the articulation of the causes and nature of the crisis. Nevertheless, the participants concurred that Zimbabwe is facing a multi-layered crisis that requires a multi-pronged approach. The Zimbabwean opposition, its civil society and the SADC region are gripped by a pervasive uncertainty as to what should be done to take Zimbabwe out of this largely self-induced quagmire. The participants agreed that the solution to the Zimbabwe crisis will have, realistically and very delicately, to balance, amongst other things, economic and political exigencies and justice and reconciliation concerns. The balance of forces in the country is too close to call and thus no single entity can go it alone.

Origins and Nature of the Zimbabwean Crisis

The round table participants saw the Zimbabwean crisis as a confluence of several colonial and post-independence experiences, namely:

- The failure of the independence leadership to transform the repressive colonial state structure into a democratic institution. Related to this is the failure of liberation movements (ZAPU and ZANU PF) to transform into a democratic government and concomitantly the failure to deliver on the independence promise of freedom;
- The dismal failure of IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies that had a very weak human development component. The result was mass impoverishment of Zimbabweans;
- The gradual capture of the state by a corrupt, self-seeking and authoritarian political elite. The lack of accountability of the post-independence government is related to the under-development of the concept of citizenship and participatory democracy. The colony conditioned the majority of Zimbabweans to acquiesce and comply with decisions and actions taken by politicians, regardless of their independent thoughts on the issues. They were compelled to act as mere unquestioning recipients and the cost of non-compliance was always too heavy;
- The contradictory nature of neo-liberal democracy that prescribed the weakening of the state when the human developmental deficits accumulated during the colonial and cold war era required an interventionist state. This, in part, compounded the state's inability to redistribute resources in a coherent and orderly manner. Hence the crisis of legitimacy and politics of chaos referred to elsewhere in this paper;
- A failure of post-independence leadership and the crisis of follower-ship. Patronage systems based on region, tribe and political affiliation have led to the demise of meritocracy and market economics. These systems have turned mediocrity into a virtue and ethics into a rude word. In this regard one of the delegates pointed out that Zimbabwe is a nation of accomplices joined together by tribe, region, political affiliation and war credentials. Government, amongst other vices, specializes in covers and cover-ups. It is for this reason that a justice system manned by kinsmen and party cadres is as evil as the Rhodesian system which was constructed along racial lines;
- A colonially inherited culture of intolerance and impunity.

These broad factors highlighted by the delegates have had their most dramatic manifestations in the following:

- Endemic political violence and gross human rights violations have taken place at the behest of the state or political elite, while the politically unconnected have no access to justice;
- There is unbridled corruption, accompanied by asset stripping, poor stewardship over national resources and, in fact, their privatization by the political elite in government;
- Terminal levels of both *de jure* and *de facto* impunity are enjoyed by various types of criminals. The most evident symptoms of this are the disregard of the doctrine of separation of powers and the general breakdown in the rule of law. Para-state arms of terror have assumed a status above the law and have thus effectively become a parallel government, invading farms, companies, NGOs and heaven knows what else;
- Bad politics produce declining economies, misery and despondency. This has led to capital flight and fatal levels of brain drain as young professionals seek less troubled waters in which to fish. This politics of chaos might at worst result in civil strife;
- Increased militarization of the state and state institutions has taken place in a time of relative peace;
- The voices of the peasantry have been smothered through economic and physical coercion. Food is used as a political weapon in engaging starving communities. Related to this is the failure of the fast-track land programme to transform the contradictions in the agrarian sector by effectively dealing with questions of access to credit and inputs, tenure and traditional leaders' role in transformed agrarian relations.

The round table therefore agreed that the current crisis in Zimbabwe is a confluence of four interlinking themes, namely land and food security; governance and citizenship; civil society and democratization; and the regional and international interventions. The crisis in Zimbabwe is essentially structural and deep-rooted. Tinkering with peripheral symptoms and changing personalities cannot address them. Neither can they be addressed through piecemeal measures. They require far-reaching, honest and all-encompassing solutions.

Implications of the Crisis and Lack of Solutions

It was the opinion of a number of the delegates that the political parties in Zimbabwe lack either the credibility or the capacity to resolve Zimbabwe's multi-layered crisis. The objective factors on the ground suggest that if the crisis is not resolved the following consequences will escalate:

- Further decline in the gross domestic product and eventual collapse of the national economy;
- Collapse of key national institutions leading to further cycles of poverty, in particular the collapse of the education, health, tourism and agriculture sectors, with a possible contagion effect on the entire SADC region;
- Exacerbation of existing socio-economic problems such as poverty, the rates of HIV/AIDS infection and deaths (the latest United Nations Economic Commission on Africa figures show a severe reversal of the Human Development Index);
- Deterioration of the rights and welfare of women and other vulnerable groups (over 80% of the population is now living below the poverty datum line);

- Lasting reversal of the gains the country made in the first ten years of independence and the achievements of the liberation movements, whose image will be shattered in the process. The deep psychological scarring and emotional trauma suffered by poor and marginalized people, in particular, will become harder and harder to heal: there is already a back-log of this dating back from pre-colonial days to the present;
- Possibility of civil strife, which will be harder to resolve given the current state of the forces of law and order.

Regional Implications

The discussion in the round table also highlighted the possibility of escalated conflict as imminent.

No country in the region remains untouched by the Zimbabwean crisis. Some countries in the region are tightening their immigration laws and policies to deal with the ever-growing numbers of Zimbabwean economic and political refugees.

Notwithstanding the benefits that have accrued to some countries in the region, who have been able to replace Zimbabwe's market share in the EU and international markets, the interdependent nature of the regional economies is being undermined by the persistence of the Zimbabwe crisis. The continued prevarication by some regional leaders in supporting the process of political transition in Zimbabwe jeopardizes the current and future economic and political prospects of SADC, the AU, NEPAD and the welfare of the peoples of the region in general.

In this regard, it was established that Zimbabwe is caught in a destructive political impasse. Until now, opposition political parties, civil society and the business community have prevailed in convincing citizens to follow the peaceful route in the face of unprecedented provocation. The current restraint will be sustainable only if efforts at an amicable settlement are stepped up.

Creating an Enabling Environment for Negotiations

In order to create an environment for a credible and legitimate negotiation process the round table recommended that the following should take place:

- disbanding of the youth militia;
- putting an end to the partisan distribution of food;
- cessation of all arbitrary arrests, intimidation and subjective prosecution of all members of the opposition and civil society activists;
- release of civil society and opposition political activists and withdrawal of unjustified political prosecutions;
- repeal of repressive laws, in particular POSA, AIPPA and the Broadcasting Services Act;
- granting of equal access to the mass electronic media;
- freeing the national air-waves by ending the ZBC monopoly.

These preconditions represent the immediate expectations of Zimbabwe's opposition groups and civil society. The round table agreed that they should be met through an irreversible process endorsed by all stakeholders in a memorandum of agreement. The

interlocutors and would-be interlocutors should have a clear mandate from all key stakeholders; they should be neutral and capable of bringing a solution to the problem.

ZANU PF's position

Current interests and thinking

The round table discussions concerning ZANU PF and Mugabe are reflected in the following points:

- It seems Mugabe sees the need and importance of going. It is not so much that he wants to go (there is a difference here), and he wants some specific guarantees;
- He is tired, he has no solutions to the crisis;
- He cannot travel, and is beginning to feel helpless and isolated;
- He is now aware of "who is in charge". The fact that ZCTU can announce a stay-away overnight and have such success makes this clear even to him;
- He wants to go out in a blaze of glory.

Succession and transition

The round table highlighted the fact that ZANU PF wants to resolve the crisis but its efforts at achieving this goal are undermined by disunity within the party. It also identified three additional groups with a stake in the succession and transition processes: the business component, the hawks and fascists, and the opportunists.

The business component (e.g. Mnangagwa, Chiyangwa, etc.): This group of individuals want change, but a change that is managed – by them. They can make decisions based purely on business sense but they understand the importance of politics in business. They want an interim president beyond Mugabe – as participants said, "they want to have their cake and eat it". They also see the need to talk to the MDC and to involve it in the transformation process. It is, however, a very dangerous group.

The hawks/fascist group: This group has no constituency of its own. It is a by-product of Mugabe's favoured politics of bureaucratic clientele and patronage. Its members are the individuals who know that when Mugabe goes, they also go. They are the ones who have been protected and promoted by him, who have enjoyed many benefits from corruption, the land grab, etc. They include, for example, Jonathan Moyo and the army element.

The opportunists: This group sees opportunities and grabs them as they come. They do not have defined constituencies but remodel themselves to suit any dispensation. They will defend the status quo to the extent that they are included among the beneficiaries, but will cease to do so when they believe change is irreversibly on the horizon. This group includes the Chinamasas, for example, who have been looking for NCA documents and are talking about constitutional reform, etc. They want to maintain some legitimacy and to keep themselves in power. They will fall whichever way suits them best and will ride on their technical skills.

MDC's position

Current motivation and thinking

- It was the impression of participants at the round table that the MDC is thought to have demonstrated enough capacity to mobilize mass action and resistance against the regime and that it is time to initiate talks. The MDC also wants to give the regional initiative a chance;
- There is an ongoing debate within the MDC about the value of talks versus mass action;
- A quick solution is sought, so that life can continue normally. The harassments, trials, etc. have affected people individually;
- Mugabe has used violence and harassment to force the MDC into quick solutions;
- There are, however, others who are thriving on the crisis. They also do not want to see change – quickly;
- Even as the struggle has gone to the streets, there are opportunists who want to seize the opportunity and use it to their own benefit;
- Many members of the MDC are in favour of restoring legitimacy through a process of transition.

MDC's expectation of the renewed initiative

- This is the first unilateral action by African leadership outside of a set framework. Thus the expectation is that it will kick-start an irreversible chain of events and processes. This is probably a preparatory process for more actions, activities and steps to come in the resolution of the crisis. One cannot see anything more than the proverbial opening of a door.
- The MDC expects this initiative to unlock other processes.
- A calendar of future activities and events may emerge. At this stage, the best that can come out of this is an agreement about the road map.
- A public acknowledgement could be made **<<Author – should be made? YK>>** by each of the parties involved, domestic and foreign, that there is a social, economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the round table emphasized the need for a clear articulation of the mandate of the present brokers and an acknowledgement of the need for an impartial facilitator.

The disillusionment within the MDC that followed the "defeat" in the presidential election is now evaporating. The strength of the opposition within civil society has given the party fresh courage, though it also makes the MDC as much a follower as a leader of public opinion. Its victory in the recent parliamentary by-elections, state-sponsored intimidation and the unbearable consequences of the economic collapse notwithstanding, have convinced many people, especially those in urban areas, that there can be no retreat. The brutality of the government's tactics has, however, created an enormous class of physical victims who will be persuaded only with difficulty to grant the sort of amnesties

and indemnities that are likely to be an integral part of any exit strategy for President Mugabe.

The dynamics within the ruling party and the opposition are quite unstable at present, and how matters develop remains to be seen as mass action gets under way. The effect of foreign pressures and promises will also be difficult to anticipate or detect in the public arena. What form a domestic compromise might take, and whether an elite pact would be honoured, are obviously considerations central to the immediate outcome of the current political engagement.

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