

# Showdown in Zimbabwe? 'IR' and the Crisis of the Global Political Agreement

Written by David Moore

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DAVID MOORE, SEP 14 2012

During the last few weeks of August and early September 2012 events and processes – all key indicators of Zimbabwe's 'international relations' – combined to create a 'perfect storm' imperilling the country's fragile inclusive government and posing the possibility of the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) deeper intervention..[1] The Global Political Agreement's (GPA) 'road map' intended to lead Zimbabwe through widely consultative constitutional change and peaceful, free and fair, elections through five years up to 2013 – guaranteed by SADC – while governing co-operatively, was teetering on a precipice created by the confluence of two phenomena blending the local and the global that signify much about 'international relations' in today's Africa.

Firstly, SADC (Southern African Development Community) held one of its regular summits, in Maputo, towards the end of the first week noted above. As usual at these meetings, Zimbabwe's progress on the 'road-map' towards the end of the inclusive government was considered. All preceding the conference seemed well: the members of the three Zimbabwean parties[2] leading the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) had signed off their draft for a new constitution based on months and months of public deliberation and reports (and millions of United Nations Development Programme dollars, for those keeping the foreign aid side of international relations in mind): its next steps were to be a second 'stakeholders' conference', a parliamentary report, and a referendum – all before a new election by mid-2013. SADC's previous meeting in Luanda, in mid-June, had refused Robert Mugabe's attempt to bypass the 'road map' and to call an election earlier than road-mapped. In August, the incoming chair of the SADC 'troika', Tanzanian president Jikaya Kikwete, was said to be very critical of ZANU-PF'S efforts to jump the gun. It looked as if the Global Political Agreement was going ahead as planned, albeit at a creaking pace.

However, a seemingly minor event occurred just before the Maputo meeting. When South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, the SADC-mandated facilitator on all things Zimbabwe, went to Harare to ensure all were heading in the same direction, he refused to meet with Arthur Mutambara, the deposed (but contesting through the courts) leader of the smaller MDC party who remained by Robert Mugabe's and Morgan Tsvangirai's sufferance one of the three 'principals' at the top of the inclusive government[3]. The next day the rest of SADC confirmed Mutambara's exclusion from the principals with whom SADC would meet (apparently SADC had made the decision before Zuma's arrival in Harare). ZANU-PF was almost as furious as the one-time student activist and later robotics professor himself, who stormed in and around both Harare's Rainbow Hotel where Zuma was meeting the Zimbabwean 'principals' and later at the SADC conference in Maputo itself. Professor Jonathan Moyo, one of ZANU-PF's leading proselytising scribes, wrote that Zuma had "unilaterally install[ed] Welshman Ncube, who is also an in-law [in fact Zuma's son-in-law] of his, as a GPA principal in a manner that shockingly violated Zimbabwe's Constitution and sovereignty"[4]. Why would Zuma and SADC depose Mutambara before the Zimbabwean courts did? According to one MDC-T activist, Zuma figured that Ncube's confirmation as the small MDC's *de facto* leader would strengthen Tsvangirai's hand, because the Matabeleland constituency had supported Tsvangirai in the past and Ncube needed that support too (Matabeleland being Ncube's 'ethnic' base, but mostly lost in the 2008 election to MDC-T). Mutambara, with no 'natural' base in Matabeleland and only a sprinkling of support in any Shona-speaking areas, could only rely on Mugabe for succour. Beholden to the president, Mutambara would support ZANU-PF's constitutional hi-jacking. One stroke for Zuma?

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Zuma may have needed that stroke, because in the weeks before the SADC meeting, ZANU-PF's Politburo held many late-night meetings reviewing the COPAC constitutional draft that had been released in mid-July, amending all of its restrictions on presidential power among much else.[5] This led to much hand-wringing at the SADC meeting and at home in Zimbabwe: the MDC parties said that all the party's negotiators signatures on the draft meant finality on the version that would go to the second stakeholders' conference, and then on to the referendum. As one analyst put it, this was part of ZANU-PF's plan to "always throw spanners in the works so that a deadlock is declared and we are forced to go to elections without the protection offered by a good constitution".[6]

Yet as the constitutional conundrum presented itself to the SADC conference, President Zuma departed Maputo to attend to his own rather more shocking crisis: at Lonmin mines in Northwest province, thirty-four striking miners had been shot by the police. Jonathan Moyo was quick to punch the staggering fighter, condemning "trigger-happy South African police for whose lack of professional restraint was nauseatingly palpable as they unleashed an unnerving volley of gunfire from their state-of-the-art automatic weapons" (sic) and declaring that such actions caused "legitimate and growing public concerns about President Zuma's leadership or lack thereof [with] wider cross-border implications on matters of the rule of law, constitutionalism, non-violence, accountability and respect for human life among many other related concerns". If Zuma's mediation in Zimbabwe was in aid of peace and non-violence, Moyo continued, South Africa's repression annulled its claim to come to Zimbabwe's aid: "the integrity of mediation to foster non-violence is credible only when it is done by those who practise what they preach". [7] Moreover, Moyo asserted that the Zuma regime's interventions in Zimbabwe were more about negating Mbeki's legacy than bettering Zimbabwe's future. These were virulent words indeed: no wonder a few Zimbabwe-South Africa watchers wondered if ZANU-PF had played a role in the fraught miners' situation south of the border (following, they would say, their support for the deposed ANC Youth League president and continuing gadfly, Julius Malema[8]). Zuma's facilitation team, led by Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu (her mandate is centred on Zimbabwe and she too has been at the receiving end of much of Moyo's vitriol) visited Zimbabwe once again, the next week, to attempt to clean up the constitutional mess.[9] By mid-September, MDC-T announced that ZANU-PF had accepted the all-party draft, but it expressed the hope "that SADC and the African Union (AU) and the international must community [sic] supervise and monitor the Second All Stakeholders' Conference." [10] One may well guess that South Africa has again exercised influence – and now the MDC-T is upping the stakes with its victory. [11]

In the meantime another rather large spanner had hit the works. A Freedom House and Mass Public Opinion Institute public opinion survey – 'non-government organisations' funded for this project by the United States Agency for International Development and thus another manifestation of 'international relations' – released on August 20 told an astounded MDC that its support had gone down to twenty from its 2010 figure of thirty-eight per cent. ZANU-PF's support had gone up to thirty-one per cent[12]. If ZANU-PF trusts the results of this report, it could be emboldened in its battle with SADC and Zuma. SADC's biggest fear is that ZANU-PF's election plans include an unconscionable degree of violence, and that SADC would not be able to muster a viable monitoring force to ensure a 'free and fair' contest. With Freedom House's welcome news, ZANU-PF could be likely to create an imbroglio serious enough to call the GPA into question, to cancel it as unworkable, and to call an election – even in the next few months.

If either ZANU-PF or the MDC-T raises the stakes to such an extent that the TIG can be declared unworkable, SADC can wash its hands of its facilitation tasks and take the battle to the African Union. From there, it can go further to the United Nations. Unless all parties agreed to an election – and some international bodies could guarantee their freedom and fairness, international bodies would thus be involved in extending a crisis for another interminable period. Stephen Chan's forecast that "some form of coalition [is then likely] for years into the Zimbabwean future" could eventuate[13]. Contrary to those who think Africans are not ready for the minimal level of democracy allowed by elections and deserve its continuous deferral,[14] nothing about elite pacts guarantees good governance, let alone creating the conditions for peace and harmony somewhere in the future. After this most recent of Zimbabwe's showdowns, its people and their allies across the continent and the world can either take the bull by the horns – or in ZANU-PF's case the cock by its comb – or resign themselves to another spell of 'inclusive government' purgatory.[15]

It is worthwhile in such circumstances to reflect upon missed possibilities in the past. Ironically, the 2001 musings of one of the men who arguably held Zimbabwe's fate in his hands as it entered its long crisis can help us in that regard:

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then President Thabo Mbeki wrote a stylised 'letter' to Robert Mugabe bemoaning how Zimbabwe's 'revolutionary party' had lost its way: it needed, among much else, a good dose of free and fair elections in 2002 to get it back on track. For some reason, however, it took the South African government under Mbeki, and its regional partners, over seven years to challenge a host of elections that the MDC won but was not allowed to take – and that only after the violence of June 2008 was too much for any neighbour to stomach. This resulted in a GPA that has allowed ZANU-PF to recoup[16].

One may go deeply into theories of international relations to explain this regional democratic deficit – perhaps the issue of 'sovereignty', mirage though it is, is too hard to handle for big regional powers fearing the label of 'sub-imperialist' and not wanting to challenge the ability of their club-members to rule as they want; maybe the tensions of cross-border class alliances as the process of primitive accumulation goes forth simply don't allow for democracy's interference (especially if taken forward by a trade-union based party); possibly regional hegemonies may always trump an elusive 'order' and stability rather than let new rulers take root with the people; or it could be simply that ZANU-PF statesmen are by far craftier statesmen than South Africa's to date. Whatever the explanation – and traditional international relations theories only scratch the surface,[17] the disappointments of those who hoped for drastic changes in the post-Mbeki era may indicate that structure is trumping agency even where presidents have quite a degree of autonomy – a few words in 2002 by an extraordinarily powerful neighbour to allow the results of an election to stand could have led to a future no worse than Zimbabwe's last 12 years.[18] There is a chance that Thabo Mbeki's successor *might* amend South Africa's failures of the past, but it is slight.

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[1] Since February 2009 Zimbabwe has been governed by a "transitional inclusive government" (TIG), following the GPA patched together under the leadership of the regional hegemon (South Africa) in mid-2008 to give ruling party ZANU-PF (the Zimbabwean African National Union – Patriotic Front) a lease on life after its electoral loss to opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) in March of that year was regained through the use of excessive force in a run-off presidential election in June. ZANU-PF and its challenger shared the state, with Robert Mugabe retaining the presidency and Morgan Tsvangirai the prime ministership. Most analysts agree that the TIG has allowed ZANU-PF time to consolidate power, in spite of internal factional struggles, while the MDC-T has not been able to take much credit for some of the positive elements of the TIG. For details over the long term see David Moore and Brian Raftopoulos, 'Zimbabwe's Democracy of Diminished Expectations,' in *Crisis! What Crisis? Exploring the Multiple Elements of Zimbabwe's Crisis*, eds. Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2012), 241-267; on the shorter term see Eldred Masunungure, 'Zimbabwe's Militarized, Electoral Authoritarianism', *Journal of International Affairs*, 65.1 (2011): 47-64.

[2] The third party is made up of politicians who split off from the main MDC in 2006, with a few parliamentary seats and a leadership contested in the courts, but with a mandated role in the inclusive government and with legal right to the MDC's original moniker. Thus the larger MDC is called "MDC-T", for Tsvangirai, although some media seem use the names MDC-Green and

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MDC-Red, the latter being the larger party.

[3] In early 2011, Mutambara withdrew from contesting the leadership of the small MDC at an upcoming conference. Later, however, his supporters contested this through the courts. As of August 2012 a decision had not been made, but Welshman Ncube, former Secretary-General of the original MDC, who in 2005 led the breakaway to form the new party, continued to play a key role as Minister of Industry and Commerce in the inclusive government and a very visible participant in constitutional negotiations. Wongai Zhangazha, 'Drama rocks Zuma visit', *Zimbabwe Independent*, August 20, 2012; Moore and Raftopoulos, 'Zimbabwe's Democracy ...', pp. 256-7.

[4] Jonathan Moyo, 'A bad week for troubled Zuma', *Sunday Mail* (Harare), August 19, 2012, also on <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news/news.aspx?newsID=8812>, accessed August 24, 2012. For more on Professor Moyo in the context of Zimbabwe's intelligentsia see David Moore "'Intellectuals" Interpreting Zimbabwe's Primitive Accumulation: Progress to Market Civilisation?' *Safundi*, 8, 2 (April 2007), 199-222.

[5] For the ruling party's view, see Jonathan Moyo, 'Copac's moment of truth,' *Sunday Mail*, August 26 2012. For the view of a University of Zimbabwe professor who once shared lecturing with Professor Moyo, see John Makumbe, 'COPAC Draft: what does it say about the Presidency?', *The Zimbabwe Mail*, August 22, 2012, <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com/opinion/13010-copac-draft-what-does-it-say-about-the-presidency.html>; accessed August 27, 2012.

[6] Patrice Makoya, 'Zanu PF is afraid of losing power — Analysts', *The Standard*, August 15, 2012, quoting Gift Mambipiri.

[7] Moyo, 'A bad week ...'

[8] Andisiwe Makinana, Lisa Steyn, Rapule Tabane, Lynley Donnelly, 'Mangaung Massacre: Conditions Ripe for

Revolution", *Mail and Guardian*, September 14-21, 2012.

[9] Tererai Karimakwenda, 'SA Facilitators in Harare to tackle draft charter deadlock', *SW Radio Africa*, August 28, 2012, [www.swradioafrica.com/2012/08/28/sa-facilitators-in-harare-to-tackle-draft-charter-deadlock/](http://www.swradioafrica.com/2012/08/28/sa-facilitators-in-harare-to-tackle-draft-charter-deadlock/).

[10] MDC, 'MDC Calls on SADC, AU to supervise stakeholders' conference', *Realchange*, September 14, 2012, email list, and [www.mdc.co.zw](http://www.mdc.co.zw).

[11] On another front, South Africa has made no effort to reverse the closing down of the SADC Tribunal, a regionally constituted court that had judged against Zimbabwe's ruling party taking land from some white commercial farmers – yet there is no evidence that the current South African government *wants* to reconstitute the tribunal: Nicole Fritz, 'SADC leaders duplicitous in

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axing tribunal', *Mail and Guardian*, September 7, 2012. A film, *Mugabe and the White African* (dir. Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson, 2009) illustrates the case that went to and won at the regional court.

[12] Freedom House, *Interim Report of a Nationwide Survey of Public Opinion in*

*Zimbabwe: June-July 2012*, August 18 2012, [www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Change%20and%20New%20Politics%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Change%20and%20New%20Politics%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf), accessed August 27, 2012. Gilbert Nyambabvu, 'MDC-T fury over support collapse report', *New Zimbabwe.com*, August 22, 2012 [www.newzimbabwe.com/news/news.aspx?newsID=8844](http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news/news.aspx?newsID=8844). Around three per cent went to other parties (including the Ncube/Mutambara MDC) but well over forty per cent were undecided or chose not to reveal their preference. Nearly two weeks later, an Afrobarometer report came up with both parties running neck and neck at just over thirty per cent each: Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure, *Voting Intentions in Zimbabwe: a Margin of Terror?* Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 103,

August 2012,

[http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/briefing\\_papers/afrobriefno103-2.pdf](http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/briefing_papers/afrobriefno103-2.pdf)

[13] Stephen Chan, 'International Views of Zimbabwe', *Zimbabwe Review*, Solidarity Peace Trust, January 21 2011,

[www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/928/international-views-of-zimbabwe/](http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/928/international-views-of-zimbabwe/), accessed February 13, 2011.

[14] Julian Neal, 'Power-Sharing as a Form of Democratic Development in Zimbabwe and South Sudan', *e-International Relations*, June 13, 2012 <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/06/13/power-sharing-as-a-form-of-democratic-development-in-zimbabwe-and-south-sudan/>.

[15] A watered down election could also take place, with some sort of pre-arranged result agreed upon, as Chan (above) hints.

[16] See David Moore, 'Two Perspectives on the National Democratic Revolution in Zimbabwe: Thabo Mbeki and Wilfred Mhanda', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30.4 (2012), 119-138; and 'A Decade of Disquieting Diplomacy: South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Ideology of the National Democratic Revolution, 1999-2009', *History Compass*, 8.8 (2010), 752-67. Perhaps another chance at critical intervention will appear in the immediate future: Finance Minister and MDC-T Secretary-General Tendai Biti has asked SADC for a \$150 million loan. Would SADC be able to add sufficient conditions to such to smooth the way out of the constitutional imbroglio and towards free elections, and would such an offer lead to more conflict between the two components of the inclusive government? Ray Ndlovu, 'Biti cash plea may fall on deaf ears in

SA', *Business Day*, September 11, 2012. One of the reasons Biti is begging for money is because he claims revenue from recently discovered and controversial diamonds is not reaching

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the treasury: it is ironic to have Biti begging for funds from South Africa given that some of the companies accused of unsavoury practice and partners are South African. See Global Witness, *Diamonds: A Good Deal for Zimbabwe?* London: Global Witness, February 2012.

[17] Perhaps neo-Gramscian theory 'civil society' with state's and their ruling class efforts to construct hegemony, combined with a stern dose of 'primitive accumulation' theory, is a way forward. Robert Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); David Moore's 'The Second Age of the Third World: From Primitive Accumulation to Public Goods?' *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 1 (February 2004), 87-109 and 'Confused policy picture is not one of a confident rising power', *Mail and Guardian*, (June 15-22, 2012). <http://mg.co.za/print/2012-06-15-confused-policy-picture-is-not-one-of-a-confident-rising-power>, accessed August 27, 2012. There are many deep currents beneath the tides of the fraught diplomacy concerning Zimbabwe.

[18] Two judges were sent by Thabo Mbeki to report on the 2002 presidential elections, considered by many to have been stolen. The *Mail and Guardian* has asked the South African courts to rule for the release of the report, but to date has been stymied. See Faranaaz Parker, 'M&G back in court over Zim report', *Mail and Guardian*, August 7, 2012.