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## *Zimbabwe's 2008 Harmonized Elections* Regional & International Reaction

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### Introduction

The unprecedented harmonized elections that Zimbabwe conducted on 29 March 2008 were generally accepted as relatively free though not necessarily fair. They thinly complied with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. However, the subsequent, controversial presidential election run-off of 27 June 2008 was inexcusably flawed and therefore discredited, particularly by the West. It was also condemned at regional level. Yet, despite that condemnation, and the growing crisis of legitimacy, Robert Mugabe began his fourth presidential term of office on 29 June 2008. Inevitably, under the circumstances, this triggered a political impasse among ZANU(PF), MDC-T and MDC-M which was eventually solved, albeit temporarily, by an illusive Power Sharing Agreement (PSA)<sup>1</sup> that was signed formally on 15 September 2008 by these three political parties. The PSA was a result of a long SADC-facilitated mediation process led by South Africa's former president, Thabo Mbeki. In the interim, for over ten months, until the power-sharing government was finally formed in February 2009, Zimbabwe was under an illegitimate *de facto* government.

Using selected organizations and countries as examples this chapter assesses the regional and international reaction to Zimbabwe's 2008 harmonized elections, including the subsequent controversial presidential election run-off and, in passing, the PSA. Its central position is that regional and international reaction has been marked by continuities rather than discontinuities of the policies governing the world's diplomatic interactions

<sup>1</sup> It is otherwise referred to as the 'Global Political Agreement' (GPA) and it has been regarded, at least by SADC and the AU, as the inevitable short-term solution to the post-election political impasse.

with the government of Zimbabwe. As such, the reaction, by and large, has been a function of old perceptions about the near-decade-long Zimbabwe crisis. The chapter also argues that although the government of Zimbabwe has struggled for nearly a decade under various forms of pressure, mainly applied by the West, its reputation and international standing were considerably worsened by the appalling manner in which the 2008 harmonized elections – particularly the subsequent presidential election run-off – were conducted. As a necessary first step, therefore, the chapter begins by considering the broad dynamics of Zimbabwe's international relations for they facilitate a better understanding of the context within which the elections were conducted.

### **Contextualising Zimbabwe's international relations before the harmonized elections**

Since the violent farm occupations that began early in 2000, otherwise known as the Fast Track Land Reform, or in revolutionary parlance, the 'Third Chimurenga', Zimbabwe's international relations were characterized by increased international proscription particularly by the West and the influential international institutions that it also dominates such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For example, all development aid and balance of payments support was indefinitely suspended. Zimbabwe's voting right in the IMF and its eligibility for financial assistance were also suspended due to its overdue financial obligations that by the end of August 2001 had totalled US\$53 million.<sup>2</sup> Its ruling elite were also under targeted sanctions<sup>3</sup> that include travel bans and asset freezes. However, the same Western powers continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe albeit through United Nations (UN) specialised agencies such as the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund and other humanitarian aid organizations. In December 2003, Zimbabwe also withdrew its membership of the Commonwealth. Last, but not least, most Western investors pulled out of Zimbabwe because they considered that the country not only lacked political and economic stability, but also dishonoured Bilateral Investment Protection Agreements.

Zimbabwe pragmatically used the diplomatic stand-off with the West as a pretext to proclaim its 'Look East' foreign policy under which it sought to strengthen its diplomatic, trade and economic ties with Asian and Middle Eastern countries from where most foreign investors and tourists have since been drawn. The policy has also encompassed the strengthening of

2 See Press Release: IMF Declares Zimbabwe ineligible to use IMF Resources, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2001/pr0140.htm> (Accessed 27/5/09).

3 The government of Zimbabwe claims that sanctions are illegal and not targeted at all.

ties with Latin America and, essentially, the rest of the Third World, which commands a numerical majority at the UN. It was strategically rooted in regime security and survival concerns camouflaged as ‘national interests’.<sup>4</sup>

Most Third World countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America had, however, continued to support the government of Zimbabwe within the general broad framework of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G-77. Russia and China as well as some countries in the Middle East, particularly Iran, also continued their support for the Mugabe administration. Perhaps most importantly, SADC countries, with the exception of Botswana and Zambia, also remained supportive. Thus the international community was tensely polarised. Critics of Mugabe had hoped that the harmonized elections would peacefully conclude the former’s era and usher in a Tsvangirai regime while Tsvangirai’s opponents regarded the 2008 elections as a timely opportunity to prevent, once and for all, ‘foreign sponsored regime change’.<sup>5</sup> Such were the dynamics of Zimbabwe’s international relations within which the 2008 harmonized elections and the subsequent controversial presidential election run-off were conducted.

### **The 2008 harmonized elections & the subsequent presidential election run-off**

Zimbabwe’s harmonized elections of 29 March 2008 were conducted within a political context that had been created through the facilitation of SADC. The regional body became more actively involved in the Zimbabwe crisis following the political violence of 11 March 2007 that saw the brutal assault of opposition MDC-T leaders and supporters by the police in Harare, and subsequent acts of politically motivated arson across the country.

The Communiqué released by the subsequent Extra-ordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government that met in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on 29 March 2007 to discuss the political situation in Zimbabwe (among other important regional matters) mandated Mbeki to continue facilitating dialogue among Zimbabwe’s three main political parties and report back to SADC’s Organ on Politics Defence and Security (OPDS) Troika. It also mandated the SADC Executive Secretary to undertake a study of the economic situation in Zimbabwe and to propose measures about how best SADC could assist Zimbabwe’s economic recovery. Furthermore, it reiterated its appeal to Britain to honour what it referred to as ‘its compensation obligations’ with regard to the land reform, in line with the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979. Finally, it also appealed for the lifting of what

4 This is a hotly contested concept in the Third World, especially in party-states such as Zimbabwe.

5 The MDC has always been considered by ZANU(PF) as the puppet of the West without domestic roots and a legitimate cause.

it referred to as 'all forms of sanctions against Zimbabwe'.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, the SADC-facilitated dialogue resulted in the enactment of Constitutional Amendment Number 18 that provided for the harmonization of the presidential, house of assembly, senatorial and local government elections. The amendment to the Electoral Act also provided for the posting of election results at the polling stations. Generally, SADC facilitated the creation of a relatively level election playing field that, comparatively speaking, enabled the opposition to freely access and campaign in what had traditionally become 'opposition-no-go-areas'. The elections were legitimately expected to be relatively free and fair, and thus democratically credible. Unfortunately, they defied expectations as they turned out not to be.

While the harmonized elections of 29 March 2008 were almost in line the SADC guidelines, the subsequent presidential election run-off of 27 June 2008 was marked by inexcusable acts of violence, intimidation, loss of life and property, displacement and the repression, in particular, of opposition supporters. The main opposition MDC-T leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, was arrested several times; many people were detained after April 2008 although most of them were later released. Many were treated for injuries, some of whom died, and thousands were displaced particularly in the rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Humanitarian aid organizations were banned on 5 June 2008.<sup>8</sup> MDC-T's access to state media was also barred and most of its campaign rallies were disrupted, at times even in full view of foreign election observers. It was under these circumstances that Tsvangirai withdrew from the presidential run-off election, effectively rendering it a controversial 'one-man race'.

Unprecedented and explicit condemnation came from the southern African region, Africa, and the UN; that it came from the West was no surprise. Even former liberation movements and ruling parties such as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa,<sup>9</sup> the Tanzania African National Union<sup>10</sup>, the Botswana Democratic Party, and the Movement for

6 See: Communiqué, Extra-ordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government, 28-29 March 2007, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. See also <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/2007/sadc0330htm> (Accessed 23/10/08).

7 See, for instance, the Electoral Institute for Southern Africa's report, Zimbabwe: 2008 Post-harmonized election violence (continued) at: <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/zim2008postd2.htm> (Accessed on 28/5/08).

8 They were suspected of campaigning for the MDC-T.

9 Baleka Mbete, Chairman of ANC and Speaker of Parliament said on 15 April 2008 that Zimbabwe's failure to release results was an example of a democratic process gone wrong. See: *ANC hits out at dire Zimbabwe situation*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/15/anc.Zimbabwe> (Accessed 20/10/08)

10 On 19 June 2008, Tanzania's Foreign Affairs Minister, Bernard Membe said: 'Zimbabwe has been our great friend. We have stood by them since the Lancaster House agreement on land issues in 1980, but on governance issues, we have started to differ with the incumbent president.' See: *Tanzania Parliament Endorses Government's Tough Stance on Zimbabwe*, <http://www.danielmolokele.blogspot.com/2008/06/tanzania-parliament-endorses-government.html> (Accessed 22/10/08).

Multiparty Democracy in Zambia all condemned the violent presidential run-off election campaign. Election observer teams from the AU, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and SADC recommended the postponement of the presidential election because the situation on the ground was undisputedly not conducive to a free, fair and credible election.<sup>11</sup> The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, also recommended postponement, citing 'too much violence and too much intimidation'. Yet, in an assertive display of absolute sovereignty and self-determination, the presidential election run-off was conducted as scheduled and Robert Mugabe 'won' a fourth presidential term of office with an unprecedented 85 per cent of the votes cast. There were mixed reactions.

### **Understanding the regional and international reaction**

Perceptions are very important in international relations. They significantly influence the reaction of actors to multi-dimensional developments taking place in other parts of the world. The first perception is that the Zimbabwe crisis is simply an ordinary democratic contest between two major competing political parties namely, ZANU(PF) and MDC-T. Both domestic and foreign supporters and sympathisers of the opposition MDC-T and Morgan Tsvangirai are influenced by this perception. The second perception is that the crisis in Zimbabwe is a serious conflict between African revolutionaries and imperialist-backed reactionaries disguised within democratic movements that are being used to reverse the 'gains of independence', particularly land acquisition. As such, domestic and foreign supporters and sympathisers of the ZANU(PF) government are influenced by this perception. They regard Mugabe as a true African hero, fighting an African cause, and regard Tsvangirai as a puppet of the West. To them the Zimbabwe crisis is part of a grand imperialist conspiracy to forcibly reform or, if this fails, dislodge, all African 'revolutionary' liberation movements, leaders and rulers, with Zimbabwe just being the pilot project. Governments influenced by this perception therefore insist on unconditional solidarity with the ZANU(PF) government as the most appropriate strategy to guarantee the security and longevity of incumbent revolutionary parties and their leaders. They also emphatically insist on African solutions to African problems.

From another perspective, the Zimbabwe crisis is just a microcosm of a larger political contest between, at least, two emerging categories of African leadership. The first category comprises the heroic but old-style conservative leadership, the vanguard of the liberation struggle, which brought independence from colonial rule. It inflexibly believes in absolute sovereignty

<sup>11</sup> See also Communique, Extra-ordinary Summit of OPDS Troika, 25 June 2008, Manzini, Swaziland.

regardless of the changing times and, occasionally, it is also radical. It publicly claims to be correcting the injustices of the past even as it creates its own share of injustices. It has less enthusiasm for substantive political and economic liberalization. It pays lip service to democratically acquired popular legitimacy. It does not trust the Western world that it blames for most, if not all, past (colonial) and current injustices. Moreover, it suspects the West of harbouring sinister motives in Africa. It regards neo-liberalism as a western-propelled strategy to re-conquer and exploit the natural resources of the Third World in general, but Africa in particular. Last, but not least, it refrains from supporting democratic trends in other countries hiding behind the façade of the 'non-interference' clause in Article 2 of the United Nations Charter. Thus, the international relations of this category of African leadership are primarily motivated by its regime security and survival concerns. In the circumstances, national interests become consequential.

The second category consists mostly of a new and young generation of modern, pragmatic and forward-looking African leaders who appear to be politically and economically reform-oriented. This group, currently predominant in the opposition, promises to depend on democratically acquired popular legitimacy to govern successfully. Whilst it remembers the past and attaches great importance to acquired inalienable values such as independence and sovereignty, it believes that these are, practically, relative rather than absolute. Equally, it believes that contemporary international relations produce relative rather than absolute gains since actors 'take' in return for 'giving', a basis which forms the essence of diplomacy. It is seemingly determined to move African countries forward, in tandem with the demands of a globalizing world so as to maximize its relative benefits, and also believes in the inevitability of legitimate expectations of internal peaceful democratic political change. Furthermore, it exhibits a stronger preference for constructive engagement and integration with the Western world rather than confrontation and de-linking. Its international relations are motivated not by suspicions and fear but by a combination of aspirations and hopes. It openly supports democratic trends in other countries. Thus, African countries in this category insist that pan-African solidarity should be strictly qualified rather than distorting it for the sake of unconditionally preserving discredited incumbent parties and leaders.

At the risk of oversimplification, most of the leadership in SADC and AU member states fit smartly into the first category. To some extent, the leadership in countries such as Botswana may fit into the second category. South Africa may exhibit a mixture of the positive attributes of both categories, thus suggesting a possible third category; and there may be countries in north Africa that defy this categorization altogether.

Therefore, even though election observer teams had strong reservations regarding the widely condemned and discredited presidential run-off, predictably both SADC and the AU refrained from disparaging it, or from

preventing Mugabe's attendance at the subsequent summit meetings as Zimbabwe's Head of State and Government, first in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt from 30 June 2008 to 1 July 2008 and second, in Johannesburg, South Africa on 17 August 2008. Thus at the institutional level, both the AU and SADC tacitly endorsed the presidential election run-off and its outcome as credible and legitimate.

Possible explanations for the unpopular AU and SADC reactions to the harmonized elections are not difficult to find. In part, the two organizations are traditionally opposed to what appear to be double standards, i.e. the West deliberately ignoring or seriously supporting, for strategic reasons, political systems worse than Zimbabwe's. The sustained use of political rhetoric and propaganda by the Mugabe administration also successfully contributed to shaping such reactions. Essentially, it reduced the political crisis to the level of a bilateral dispute between Britain and Zimbabwe, specifically over the generally sensitive land question, but one that the British Labour government is accused of having unnecessarily internationalized. Accordingly, the Mugabe administration has continuously blamed the British and the American governments, together with their friends and allies, of causing most of the problems bedevilling Zimbabwe. This is supported by the notion that that runs deep and wide in the Third World: that both the government of Zimbabwe and Mugabe are being punished not for bad governance or for violating human rights, but for daring to take land from the white commercial farmers and directly confronting the West.<sup>12</sup>

### Dissecting the SADC reaction

SADC is now a regional security complex, a group of countries sufficiently linked that their national security concerns cannot be realistically considered separately.<sup>13</sup> A security threat anywhere in SADC is regarded as a potential threat to the security of all.

Historically, Zimbabwe has been a key player in southern Africa partly because of the size of its economy and its geographically strategic location. It has had a significant impact on the regional economy as it links most of the regional transport and energy systems. It was once the breadbasket of the region. It also once set positive political standards for some, if not all, of its neighbours. Furthermore, it has in the past actively contributed to promoting regional and international peace and security. Refugees from all directions used to find a second home in Zimbabwe. Sadly, it is no longer able to play such critical, positive roles. Naturally, therefore, a politically

12 In fact, Robert Mugabe is a hero to many people in and outside Zimbabwe for standing firm against the West and what he believes is right.

13 See Buzan, B. (1991) *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. Harvester/Wheatshaf, London and New York, p. 190.

unstable Zimbabwe with the fastest declining economy in the region, which now sends out refugees in all directions, unsettles its neighbours.

There have been numerous SADC Summit and OPDS Troika meetings to solve the Zimbabwe crisis, but it appeared to defy all such attempts until the historic 15 September 2008 PSA. Since 11 March 2007, SADC had been closely monitoring and reacting to developments in Zimbabwe. Indeed, as noted above, SADC is credited for the relatively peaceful and free harmonized elections of 29 March 2008 and for the PSA itself. The SADC Election Observer Mission (SEOM), which comprised 163 members drawn from eleven member states, prematurely endorsed the 29 March 2008 harmonized elections as being a peaceful and credible expression of the will of the people. However, in what may have sounded like a threat, the team leader, Angola's Minister of Youth and Sport, Marcos Barrica, urged Zimbabweans to consider the peace in their country stressing that, 'You have to avoid conflict. I have seen war, and you should avoid it.'<sup>14</sup> It is fair to argue, however, that SADC was significantly discredited by allowing, or at least failing to prevent, the atrocities surrounding the controversial presidential run-off election.

The OPDS Troika met in Sandton, South Africa on the margins of the 28<sup>th</sup> Ordinary SADC Summit meeting on 16-17 August 2008. The Troika appealed to the political parties in Zimbabwe to sign any outstanding agreements and conclude the negotiations as a matter of urgency in order to restore political stability in Zimbabwe.<sup>15</sup> On 20 October, the OPDS Troika met again in Mbabane to review the political situation in the region, focusing specifically on Zimbabwe, the DRC and Lesotho. The MDC-T leader did not attend the meeting, allegedly because he did not have a proper travel document. Authorities in Harare cited shortages of the necessary passport paper and ink arising from what they referred to as 'sanctions'. Ironically, the Troika remained silent, at least publicly, on the 'technicalities' that had prevented Tsvangirai from attending the supposedly crucial meeting and, instead, decided to postpone and relocate the meeting.

The Extra-ordinary OPDS Troika meeting held in Harare on 27-28 October failed to resolve the deadlock, and recommended a full SADC Summit meeting<sup>16</sup>; this was held on 9 November in Sandton, Johannesburg, and also failed. Instead, it 'ruled' that a unity government be formed forthwith and that the contested Ministry of Home Affairs be co-shared between ZANU(PF) and MDC-T. The MDC-T rejected the 'ruling' and appealed for both the AU and the UN to intervene to salvage the threatened PSA, which many regarded as the only viable solution to the crisis. It is important to stress that, contrary to what many believe, SADC is not a

<sup>14</sup> See *The Herald*, 31 March 2008.

<sup>15</sup> See Communiqué, Extra-ordinary Summit of OPDS Troika, 17 August 2008, Sandton, South Africa.

<sup>16</sup> See Communiqué, Extra-ordinary Summit of OPDS Troika, 27-28 October, Harare, Zimbabwe.

sovereign authority above the government of Zimbabwe with the mandate to 'rule' or impose solutions. It can only recommend.

SADC has clearly been very cautious about openly criticizing Mugabe and the ZANU(PF) government. Instead, it has pursued 'quiet diplomacy', which essentially avoids applying open, direct criticism or pressure on Mugabe. In adopting this approach, SADC may have hoped to achieve some limited changes that fell short of 'regime change'. Such an approach is strategically aimed at a situation that Fisher and Ury aptly describe as 'getting to yes: negotiating an agreement without giving in'.<sup>17</sup> Thus SADC assisted ZANU(PF) to negotiate the PSA 'without substantively giving in'.

However, there were emerging signs of difference that threatened to tear the regional bloc apart. As noted earlier, Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania openly expressed concern over the delays in releasing the first presidential poll results and the implausible manner in which the run-off election campaign was conducted. Yet, only Botswana and Zambia refused to formally recognize Mugabe as the democratically elected president of Zimbabwe until after the PSA was signed. Each SADC country had its own foreign policy principles to adhere to and national interests to safeguard in relation to the crisis. It is, for example, common knowledge that the influx of refugees and the associated societal challenges of crime, health<sup>18</sup> and prostitution as well as pressure over scarce resources, are potential causes of xeno-phobic violence similar to that which occurred in South Africa in 2008.

In some measure, the SADC reaction to the election crisis in Zimbabwe was also caused by a fear of internal political instability, a threat constantly insinuated by ex-freedom fighters as likely to occur in the event of Mugabe losing the elections. It was also due to distorted pan-African solidarity that, as many would now believe, seemingly seeks to ensure the unconditional security of the incumbent party and leader. Furthermore, it is an indication of the growing resentment among some Africans leaders against perceived Western attempts to effect what they, rhetorically or otherwise, refer to as 'unconstitutional regime change'. Most African leaders have a political culture of acquiring and retaining power through undemocratic methods. Generally, the patriarchal African political culture also considers it un-African to criticize elders, especially those with Mugabe's revolutionary credentials. Moreover, SADC does not want to be perceived as paving the entrance for the opposition lest it sets what most incumbents throughout the continent generally regard as a 'negative' precedent.

SADC's reaction was also partly influenced by its elitist concept of security, which it defines in almost exclusively military terms and in direct reference to the incumbent. Seemingly, the state enjoys the singular prerogative of defining – and making itself the single most important referent

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, R. and W. Ury (1999), *Getting to Yes: Negotiating an agreement without giving in*. Random House, London.

<sup>18</sup> At the time of writing, South Africa and Botswana had begun to grapple with the cholera epidemic that was allegedly traceable to Zimbabwe.

object of – security. Such notions of security are too deficient to guarantee human security in a situation in which the state, quasi-state and quasi-military institutions may be the major causes of human insecurity. As Francis Makoa lamented, SADC has not yet shown its readiness to acknowledge that insecurity and instability in southern Africa also have systemic and structural causes.<sup>19</sup> SADC's lack of legitimately expected political will to react appropriately to the election crisis in Zimbabwe testifies to its institutional weaknesses.

The language used in the various treaties, protocols and defence and security co-operation pacts illustrates SADC's guiding approach to regional peace and security. For example, Article 7 of the SADC Mutual Defence Pact stresses the strict adherence by member states to the fundamental principle of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Article 8 also deals with what are vaguely referred to as 'Destabilizing Factors'. It reads:

State parties undertake not to nurture, harbor or support any person, or group of persons or institutions whose aim is to destabilize the political, military, territorial and economic or social security of a State Party.

With the exception of Botswana, and Zambia under the late President Levy Mwanawasa, most SADC countries have religiously adhered to such vague provisions that may lack objective and universally applicable definitions. Thus, SADC's reaction to the election crisis in Zimbabwe effectively guaranteed the security and longevity of the incumbent. As Maxi Schoeman observed:

The protracted implosion of Zimbabwe continues unabated and it is clear that SADC member states cannot ... intervene in the name of SADC principles to stop the degradation of the rule of law and human rights or stop the blatant and violent attacks on ordinary people who seem to be punished for their opposition to the regime in the country. On paper everything is in place to address the situation in Zimbabwe. In practice, there is a rift in the organization and the 'old guard' under the leadership of Mugabe is clearly in charge, at times making a mockery of the organization's principles and objectives.<sup>20</sup>

SADC seemingly disregarded the first round presidential election results as both politically and practically insignificant and, instead, made its critical decisions, with far-reaching consequences, primarily on the basis of the results of the presidential election run-off in June. Thus, to Africa and in the rest of the Third World, SADC effectively legitimized Robert Mugabe as the democratically elected President of Zimbabwe. Critics accuse SADC of complicity in subverting the freely expressed democratic will of the people

<sup>19</sup> F. K. Makoa (2005) 'Managing Conflict in an Integrated Southern Africa: Peace, Security and Stability in Lieu of Democracy?' in *Monitoring Regional Integration in Southern Africa Year Book Vol. 5*, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> See Schoeman, M. (2006) 'Towards a Collective Security Identity?', in *Monitoring Regional Integration in Southern Africa Year Book Vol. 6*, p. 255.

of Zimbabwe as expressed in the 29 March elections. Equally, they accuse SADC of contributing to the Zimbabwe crisis all the necessary ingredients for its potential escalation in future. Therefore, there is growing pessimism regarding SADC's future credibility in handling crises similar to that of the Zimbabwe election.

SADC's approach of seeking to ensure only 'change without regime change' has been echoed by Eldred Masunungure who describes it as a 'pro-regime policy change approach'.<sup>21</sup> However, the highly mysterious nature of politics in general, and Zimbabwean politics in particular, suggests that the potential of 'regime policy changes' to inevitably result in regime change should not be underestimated. In fact, the amendments to the Electoral Act contributed to the creation of an enabling environment for the March harmonized elections that nearly resulted in a 'constitutional regime change', thanks to the ZEC's 'meticulous' verification of results.

Lastly, SADC is still captivated by the, arguably, indelible historical fact that Mugabe is one of the key regional statesmen who initiated the processes of regional co-operation in southern Africa under the aegis of the Frontline States. Indeed, it was Mugabe rather than Tsvangirai who signed the SADC Treaty that enlisted Zimbabwe as one of its core member states. To this extent, SADC's reaction to the Zimbabwe election crisis would suggest that its continued support for Mugabe, and for ZANU(PF), remains likely as long as the solidarity among liberation movements and leaders, as well as incumbent political parties, remains strong. Quiet diplomacy will remain the cornerstone of SADC's approach towards any negative political developments in Zimbabwe until Mugabe's voluntary, peaceful and dignified exit takes place at a time of his own choosing. SADC is very unlikely to adopt Botswana's preference for 'megaphone diplomacy'.

### The African Union reaction

The AU has a Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Chapter 7, Articles 19 to 24 deal with democratic elections while Chapter 8, Articles 25 to 28 specifically provide for 'Arrangements and Sanctions' in cases of unconstitutional changes of government. The AU election observer team was made up of 21 observers drawn from across the continent. It was led by former Sierra Leone President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah who described the pre-election environment as peaceful.<sup>22</sup> The co-ordinator of the mission, Professor Raphael Omotayo Olaniya, said that the presence of the AU observer team constituted proof of the AU's commitment to the promotion of democracy and the rule of law on the continent. He stressed that

<sup>21</sup> In an unpublished paper presented at workshop that was organized by OSSREA on the theme: 'Zimbabwe Political Situation'. Holiday Inn, Harare, 8 September 2007.

<sup>22</sup> See *The Herald*, 28 March 2008.

the mission's main objective was to provide an honest, independent and impartial observation and assessment of the organization and conduct of the harmonized elections.<sup>23</sup> Their recommendation for the postponement of the presidential run-off election, like that of SEOM, was also ignored by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

While the AU mission expressed concern over the delays in the announcement of results, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) election observer mission concluded that on the whole, the basic conditions for credible, free and fair elections as contained in the OAU/AU Principles of Governing Democratic Elections in Africa (2002) existed.<sup>24</sup> But, as it turned out, such verdicts were only relatively accurate with reference to the period immediately prior to and during the actual voting days. The observer mission also naively recommended the postponement of the presidential run-off election. Another reaction to the election crisis came from 40 eminent African personalities, including former UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan and some retired presidents, who in the run-up to the presidential election run-off wrote to Mugabe asking him for an assurance that it would be free and fair.<sup>25</sup> They were naive because, as it turned out, they were ignored.

Although it naturally expressed what it referred to as 'deep concern with the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe based on the negative reports of SADC, AU and PAP election observers about the presidential election run-off held on 27 June 2008 and the loss of life that occurred in Zimbabwe,'<sup>26</sup> the 11<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Sharm El Sheikh failed to prevent Mugabe from attending the meeting and made no attempt to chastise him. The AU Peace and Security Council held its talks at the same time but, reportedly, no mention was made of Zimbabwe as a serious case for consideration. Instead, the Assembly welcomed Mugabe as the Head of State and Government of Zimbabwe. It encouraged he and Tsvangirai to honour their commitment to initiate dialogue with a view to promoting peace, stability, democracy, and the reconciliation of the Zimbabwean people. Furthermore, it pledged support for both the creation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) and the SADC facilitation.<sup>27</sup>

The AU also welcomed the PSA of 15 September 2008 and pledged to be one of its guarantors. Therefore, in future, the AU is most likely to follow SADC's preferred approach of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Mugabe. The preference will only last until the Zimbabwe crisis has escalated to an unacceptable humanitarian catastrophe constituting a threat to international peace and security. But, using African standards, such a stage may never be reached in the lifetime of many.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *The Herald*, 1 April 2008.

<sup>25</sup> *The Standard*, 15-21 June 2008.

<sup>26</sup> AU Summit Resolution on Zimbabwe, 2 July 2008, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## The reaction of the United Nations

On 21 April 2008, opposition MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai met the UN Secretary-General on the sidelines of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Accra and urged UN and AU intervention. In response to the delays in releasing results of the presidential election, the UN Security Council held a special session on Zimbabwe on 29 April 2008. The Secretary-General also expressed concern over the unprecedented delay, and warned that the situation in Zimbabwe could deteriorate. He further expressed frustration with regional (SADC) leaders' continued suggestion that the rest of the world had no role to play in the Zimbabwe situation, and said that the credibility of the democratic process in Africa was at stake.<sup>28</sup>

The Secretary-General had vainly insisted that international election observers be present to monitor the presidential run-off election. While Latin American and EU members wanted to send a special envoy to Zimbabwe, this was prevented by South Africa which chaired the meeting. However, the Security Council issued a statement on 23 June 2008 condemning the violent run-off election campaign by ZANU(PF) and expressed regret that the violence had made a free and fair election impossible. The UN remained concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe. A Security Council resolution to impose a multilateral arms embargo, travel bans and financial sanctions on Zimbabwe was vetoed by Russia and China on 11 July 2008. The Secretary-General welcomed what soon became a not so historic 15 September 2008 PSA that defied implementation. He hoped that the PSA would pave the way for durable peace in Zimbabwe. He acknowledged Thabo Mbeki for his tireless efforts to facilitate the agreement.

In a related development, Zimbabwe appeared to have become allergic to any visit by UN envoys, especially after two of them, Anna Kajimulo Tibaijuka and John Eageland, had produced allegedly 'biased' reports on the situation in Zimbabwe in 2005. This had happened during Kofi Annan's term as Secretary-General. Since then, Zimbabwe has not unconditionally facilitated any such 'fact-finding' missions. For example, on 21 November 2008 a team of 'Elders' led by the same Kofi Annan was refused entry into Zimbabwe largely because of ZANU(PF)'s suspicions that they were coming to bolster MDC-T.<sup>29</sup> But on 22 November 2008, Zimbabwe's Foreign Affairs Minister, Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, argued that Zimbabwe

<sup>28</sup> See also 'Strong Talk About Zimbabwe at the UN', (*The New York Times*, 17 April 2008), <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/17/worldafrica/17zimbabwe.html?r=&coref=slogin> (Accessed 1/4/08)

<sup>29</sup> A ZANU(PF) Spokesperson, Christopher Mutswangwa, openly accused Kofi Annan of shedding 'crocodile tears' while he had allegedly legitimized USA sanctions against Zimbabwe by remaining silent. See: 'Kofi Annan Not Welcome in Zimbabwe', SABCNews.com (Accessed 21/11/08).

had not barred the 'Elders' but had, instead, postponed their visit because Mr Annan had not made prior consultations with the government of Zimbabwe on the 'timing and programme'.<sup>30</sup> The 'Elders' resorted to meetings in South Africa with civic society groups operating in Zimbabwe. They also met Morgan Tsvangirai. From these meetings the 'Elders' obtained critical information about the post-election crisis in Zimbabwe. However, the UN decided to support the AU position of backing the SADC 'quiet diplomacy' initiatives. As long as the Zimbabwe post-election crisis does not threaten international peace and security, the UN will likely maintain this approach of backing the regional organizations in line with Chapter VIII of its Charter.

### The European Union (EU)

The European Union and Zimbabwe have enjoyed fruitful co-operation since 1981, but since 2002 the relationship has deteriorated due to major disagreements over essential elements of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement resulting in restrictions on the co-operation.<sup>31</sup> In February 2002, the EU partially suspended co-operation and assistance under the European Development Fund. It also adopted restrictive measures such as an arms embargo, visa bans, and the freezing of assets against some 168 senior officials.<sup>32</sup>

The EU considered the results of the harmonized elections as relatively credible but declared the June presidential run-off election results illegitimate and unacceptable. On 22 July 2008, it extended its list of sanctions that for the first time included companies linked to ZANU(PF). On 15 September 2008, the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, which comprises 27 EU Foreign ministers and the EU commission, issued a statement welcoming the conclusion of the PSA. It thanked Mbeki for his mediation. However, the Council stressed that it would study the details of the agreement and would be attentive to its implementation. It further stressed that the agreement should provide the Zimbabwean people with the reforms they awaited, which included democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and the restoration of the country's economic and social situation. The EU promised that it stands ready to adopt a new set of economic measures to support a transitional government observably taking steps to restore democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe particularly

<sup>30</sup> See *The Sunday Mail Online*, 23 November 2008 at: <http://www.sundaymail.co.zw/inside.aspx?sectid=926&cat=12>. (Accessed 23/11/08). Given Kofi Anan's long experience in high-level diplomatic service, the reasons given by the government of Zimbabwe sound weak.

<sup>31</sup> These mainly centre on good governance, rule of law, and promotion of human rights, among other conditionalities for development co-operation.

<sup>32</sup> The arms embargo was imposed in reaction to Zimbabwe's intervention in the DRC in 1998.

by organizing transparent multi-party elections and promoting economic rehabilitation of the country. It however decided to postpone any decisions on sanctions until its October 2008 meeting.<sup>33</sup>

On 13 October 2008, the EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Luxemburg condemned what they described as Mugabe's 'unilateral decision to form a new government which had not been agreed by all parties' and it threatened a fresh wave of sanctions if the PSA continued to be blocked.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, the EU said it remained ready to undertake a political dialogue with Zimbabwe as defined in the provisions of Article 8 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and it attached importance to future EU-Zimbabwe co-operation. Clearly, the EU approach towards the government of Zimbabwe will, predictably, remain a function of the confidence-building measures to be adopted by the envisaged inclusive government of Zimbabwe. Essentially, it will be performance-based.

## South Africa

Hennie Strydom<sup>35</sup> has correctly observed that post-apartheid South Africa's ideological choice to join the developing world in transforming international relations and to bring about a more just world order based on multilateralism and respect for the purposes and principles of the UN is a function of the country's history, its position in Africa and its membership of NAM. South Africa is a formidable economic and military power house in the sub-region and the continent as a whole. Until the momentous end of apartheid rule in April 1994, southern African countries, including Zimbabwe, had experienced adversarial relations with their neighbour, essentially as its victims. Since 1994, South Africa has therefore been cultivating a confidence- and trust-building foreign policy strategy towards its immediate neighbours, Africa and the rest of the world. It has not been keen on being perceived as a relic of the former apartheid regime. Thus, since joining the United Nations, South Africa has championed the cause of the Third World, particularly Africa. It has sought to contribute towards reforming the Security Council on the basis of proposals put forward by such organizations as the AU and NAM. Its approach towards the crisis in Zimbabwe should be understood within this broad context of post-apartheid foreign policy.

33 See 'EU Council Conclusion on Zimbabwe', *The Zimbabwean* 17 September 2008, [http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15/eu-council-conclusion-on-zimbabwe&catid=31:top%20zimbabwe%20stories&Itemid=66](http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15/eu-council-conclusion-on-zimbabwe&catid=31:top%20zimbabwe%20stories&Itemid=66) (Accessed 17/09/08)

34 See 'EU Slams Mugabe, Threatens new Sanctions against Zimbabwe'. AFP report in *Eubusiness*: <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1223902928.18> (Accessed 13/10/08)

35 Strydom, H. (2007) 'The Context and Determinants of South Africa's New Role in the United Nations', p. 28, in *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol. XXIX No. 1, May 2007, (pp. 1-37). Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

Since its tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in January 2008, South Africa has come under increasing criticism, particularly from Britain and the United States, for preventing grave human rights abuses in Burma, Sudan and Zimbabwe from being included in the Security Council's agenda. South Africa has defended its position by arguing that not all human rights abuses are a threat to international peace and security and therefore need not be discussed in the Security Council. Its reaction to the election crisis in Zimbabwe was, at least in part, a function of its foreign policy principles.

On 29 April 2008, when the Security Council held a special session on the situation in Zimbabwe, some EU and Latin American members wanted to send out a special envoy but this was successfully prevented by South Africa which chaired the session. They further vetoed any draft resolution on Zimbabwe in the period before the 27 June 2008 run-off election and subsequently, arguing that the UN risked complicating the situation in Zimbabwe that at the time had not reached the levels of Kenya's December 2007 post-election violence. Furthermore, when the Security Council met on 12 July 2008 to agree on a US- and UK-sponsored draft resolution that sought to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe, South Africa together with Russia, China and Vietnam voted against it. Partly as a result of South Africa's actions and inactions (alongside those of China and Russia) the Security Council has not been able to pass a resolution on Zimbabwe. Thus, South Africa has consistently shielded Mugabe from potentially devastating US- and UK-sponsored international action.

However, support for Robert Mugabe within the ANC has not always been consistent. For one thing, Nelson Mandela regards Mugabe as a despot.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the harmonized elections, there were conflicting views between the ANC position as articulated by its president Jacob Zuma and that of the South African government as articulated by President Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki has always been reluctant to explicitly criticize Mugabe even when it was prudent and necessary to do so thereby undermining his credibility as an impartial mediator. Yet, during a visit to Zimbabwe shortly before the run-off election, former ANC Deputy President – who soon afterwards succeeded Mbeki – President Kgalema Motlanthe, together with the ANC Secretary General, echoed support for ZANU(PF) citing strong historical ties between the two liberation movements; and in November 2008, ANC Youth League representatives visited Harare as a sign of solidarity. At the occasion of the official signing ceremony of the PSA on 15 September 2008 in Harare, former South African Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Aziz Pahad told the SABC News Zimbabwe correspondent Thulasizwe Simelane that the PSA was a vindication of South Africa's approach and that he hoped the historic agreement had put to rest

<sup>36</sup> Robert Guest (2004) *The Shackled Continent: Africa's Past, Present and Future*. Pan Books, London, p. 229.

‘the fallacious notion of “quiet diplomacy” because it had always been our view that diplomacy by its very nature is quiet.’<sup>37</sup>

In October 2008, the South African government approved a R300 million (US\$28 million) package to help Zimbabwe procure agricultural inputs ahead of the 2008/09 summer cropping season. It also called for an international united approach to help in the reconstruction and reconciliation of Zimbabwe.<sup>38</sup> However, in an unusual manifestation of rare impatience, on 20 November 2008 the South African Cabinet issued a statement indicating that it had decided to withhold this support until a representative government had been established.<sup>39</sup>

In the final analysis, Mbeki’s seemingly endless mediation may have been intended simply to create an impression of commitment to crisis management. In any case, he has always stressed that it is ultimately the singular right and duty of Zimbabweans to solve their own problems. Clearly, South Africa does not want to share the responsibility or blame for contributing to the fall of the Mugabe administration. Unfortunately, retrospectively, both South Africa and Mbeki will be remembered less for any good they might have done and more for the good they did not do and the bad they did.

Nonetheless, in the foreseeable future and assuming South Africa’s internal political dynamics, foreign policy principles and, indeed, its strategic self-interest considerations, remain the same, ‘quiet diplomacy’ is likely to remain the cornerstone of its approach towards the Zimbabwe crisis.

## Botswana

President Ian Khama was the first SADC leader to openly criticize Robert Mugabe after the latter lost the first round of the presidential election on 29 March 2008. However, Botswana-Zimbabwe relations had waned since the SADC Parliamentary Forum dismissed the controversial 2002 presidential election, which gave Robert Mugabe a third presidential term, as having been neither free nor fair. While Botswana recognized the results of the harmonized elections of 29 March 2008, it closely followed events leading up to the presidential election run-off. It expressed serious concern about the deteriorating political situation and made repeated calls on the authorities in Zimbabwe to take the necessary steps to ensure a climate conducive to the holding of a free and fair presidential election run-off. It argued that the process that led to the run-off election did not conform to the SADC guidelines governing the conduct of democratic elections. It advised that in line with the AU Declaration on the Principles Governing

<sup>37</sup> SABC International, Live Interview, Harare, 15 September 2008.

<sup>38</sup> See *The Herald*, 14 October 2008.

<sup>39</sup> See South Africa Cabinet Statement on Zimbabwe: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/mbeki235.19047.html> (Accessed 22/11/08)

Democratic Elections, conditions should be established as soon as possible for the holding of free, fair and credible elections.

On 12 June 2008, Botswana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation summoned the Ambassador of Zimbabwe, Thomas Mandigora, to express strong concern over the 'arrest and detention of opposition leaders' that, Botswana argued, undermined the process of holding a free and fair election.<sup>40</sup> According to a press statement released by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation on 4 July 2008, entitled '*Botswana's Position on Zimbabwe*', Botswana argued that as a country which practices democracy and the rule of law, it could not recognize the outcome of the 27 June presidential election run-off because it violated the core principles of the SADC, the AU and the UN. It called on other SADC member states to adopt the same position. On 1 July 2008, it called on both the AU and SADC to exclude Zimbabwe from their meetings because 'a disputed election did not give the government of President Robert Mugabe legitimacy'.<sup>41</sup> It vainly recommended the suspension of Zimbabwe from SADC Summit meetings until it demonstrated its commitment to strictly adhering to the SADC principles. It argued that such steps would enhance the credibility of SADC and provide an enabling environment for the people of Zimbabwe to find lasting solutions to their problems. It agreed with the AU position that mediation efforts should continue, but insisted that such mediation had to be expeditious, given a definite time frame, and conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust and good faith where both parties are treated as equal partners.<sup>42</sup>

In his State of the Nation Address on 3 November 2008 on the occasion of the opening of the Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament of Botswana, President Khama stressed that while Botswana respected the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, it discharges its international responsibilities in line with its own values, regional protocols, and global consensus, voicing its own opinion as and when it feels that it is justified to do so. He added that this is exactly what Botswana had been doing in the context of developments in Zimbabwe about which it remained seriously concerned regarding the failure to form a legitimate government. Botswana reiterated the importance of SADC member states upholding the regional standards that they have collectively and voluntarily adopted. Above all, he strongly believed that one viable way forward for Zimbabwe was to have a re-run of the run-off presidential election but

40 See New Zimbabwe.com, 13 June 2008: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/botswana20.18333.html> (Accessed 5/10/08)

41 Botswana's Vice President Mompoti Merafhe made these remarks during his speech at the AU Heads of State and Government Summit on 1 July 2008 in Sharm El Sheikh. See the full speech on Mmegi Online, <http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=1&aid=1&dir=2008/july/Thursday3> (Accessed 22/10/08)

42 See [http://www.mofaic.gov.bw/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=301](http://www.mofaic.gov.bw/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=301) (Accessed 23/10/08)

under full international sponsorship and supervision.<sup>43</sup> In response, Zimbabwe's de facto Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, who had also been one of the ZANU(PF) chief negotiators in the long SADC facilitated talks, said Khama's statement was unstatesman-like, unwarranted and unjustified interference in Zimbabwe's internal affairs as well as an act of extreme provocation.<sup>44</sup>

Relations worsened when Zimbabwe accused Botswana of interfering in its internal affairs by allegedly, and since 2002, facilitating the training of MDC-T militia to destabilize Zimbabwe with the assistance of both Britain and the United States. According to the *Standard Online*, Botswana said it was invited to an extra-ordinary meeting of the SADC OPDS Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDC) in Maputo, Mozambique, on 5 November 2008. The ISDC requested that Zimbabwe provide documentary evidence to support its allegations. The paper further stated that Botswana re-affirmed its continued adherence to the principles and policies of good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Botswana also said that it reminded Zimbabwe of the existence of mechanisms for the management of bilateral relations such as the Botswana-Zimbabwe Joint Permanent Commission on Defence and Security that has held over 25 annual meetings since its establishment.<sup>45</sup>

On 14 November 2008 Botswana's Foreign Affairs Minister, Mpandu Skelemani, said that his country did not share the SADC consensus on Zimbabwe, especially regarding the co-management of the Ministry of Home Affairs. He reiterated that if the PSA could not be quickly implemented, then the international community should demand a re-run of the presidential election under international supervision.<sup>46</sup>

To show its concern about the Zimbabwe crisis, Botswana began a half-hour television programme, *Zimbabwe: The Voice from Within*, which was aired live every Wednesday evening. It focused specifically on the unfolding crisis in Zimbabwe. Botswana has thus unreservedly become Zimbabwe's leading regional critic. It has openly stated that it shares with the UK a common approach towards the Zimbabwe crisis, and argued that SADC's 'quiet diplomacy' had expired.<sup>47</sup> As a matter of principle and to

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.prgovbw.blogspot.com/2008/11/state-of-nation-address-by-his.html> (Accessed 04/11/08)

<sup>44</sup> *The Herald*, 5 November 2008.

<sup>45</sup> *The Standard Online*, 9 November 2008.

<sup>46</sup> He made these remarks while briefing the Botswana Parliament on the Extra-ordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government held on 9 November 2008 in Sandton, South Africa. See 'Botswana Doesn't Support SADC on Zimbabwe ministries', ZWNEWS.com, 14 November 2008: <http://www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=19683> (Accessed 16/11/08)

<sup>47</sup> Captured on Botswana Television on 3 December 2008, 7.30 p.m., when President Khama made these remarks in an exclusive interview with Christopher Nyanga during his official visit to the UK.

prevent setting what it considers a negative precedent, one which would have seriously negative ramifications for the entire sub-region, Botswana seemingly preferred to 'stand only with a legitimate government of Zimbabwe that stands right'. While Botswana is likely to remain a lonely voice in the SADC wilderness, it is most likely that it will eventually respect and adopt SADC's approach rather than risk isolating itself from the sub-regional body.

## Zambia

Zambia may have begun losing patience with the Zimbabwe crisis following the political violence in Harare on 11 March 2007. It is also important to remember that in August 2007, when SADC met in Lusaka to consider an economic rescue plan for Zimbabwe, President Levy Mwanawasa is reported to have clashed with Robert Mugabe. In reaction to the unprecedented delays in the announcement of the results of the 2008 harmonized elections, the escalating politically motivated violence and arrest of opposition supporters, Mwanawasa (as SADC Chairman) convened an extra-ordinary SADC Summit meeting on 12 April 2008, which Mugabe did not attend. Mbeki grudgingly participated for his position had remained consistent: 'there was no crisis in Zimbabwe'. Rather, he argued, events in Zimbabwe were 'politically normal' in the circumstances.<sup>48</sup>

Between the harmonized elections and the 15 September 2008 PSA, Zambia under Mwanawasa did not recognize Mugabe as Zimbabwe's democratically elected president. Mwanawasa's death came as a blow to what appeared to be a gathering momentum towards the possible end of SADC's quiet diplomacy, and indifference to the plight of ordinary Zimbabweans.<sup>49</sup> However, it also marked the beginning of the end of Zambia's open criticism of the government of Zimbabwe. The newly elected Zambian President, Rupiya Banda, who was born in Zimbabwe,<sup>50</sup> has never been, and is unlikely to be, openly critical of Mugabe. Indeed, he attended the PSA signing ceremony. Mugabe reciprocated by attending Banda's inauguration as Zambia's elected President.

However, the absence of Banda at the Extra-ordinary SADC Summit meeting in South Africa on 9 November 2008 was arguably a strategic tactic, to avoid 'looking Robert Mugabe straight in the eyes' and making an honest contribution to the post-election Zimbabwe crisis. Nevertheless, post-Mwanawasa Zambia has tacitly endorsed Mugabe's presidency,

<sup>48</sup> Citing the example of negotiations that eventually ended apartheid, Mbeki believed that successful negotiations only took place when people were killing each other daily.

<sup>49</sup> Dr Levy Mwanawasa suffered a stroke during the AU Summit at Sharm El Sheikh and died in Paris on 18 August 2008 at the age of 59.

<sup>50</sup> 13 February 1937 in Gwanda, Matabeleland South Province.

thus effectively distancing itself from Botswana's approach. Zambia is also likely to adopt a distorted version of positive neutrality under which it will either support the government of Zimbabwe or abstain from voting at SADC level for any decision that might be against Mugabe's desires.

## Kenya

Zimbabwe's harmonized elections were held against the background of Kenya's post-election violence that had ultimately resulted in a negotiated power-sharing agreement. Indeed, even the concept of Zimbabwe's PSA was, in large measure, informed by that of Kenya. Kenya's Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, became the fiercest critic of Mugabe in east Africa over the deplorable manner in which the harmonized elections had been conducted and the controversial presidential election run-off.<sup>51</sup> He even referred to Mugabe as a 'disgrace' and lamented that the solidarity which some African leaders had shown towards him, was a distortion of pan-Africanism. On 23 November 2008, he recommended the deployment of AU Peacekeepers in Zimbabwe and, like President Khama of Botswana, said that the PSA was dead. Odinga suggested that fresh elections under international supervision were the only lasting solution to the Zimbabwe crisis. The government of Kenya is most likely to endorse Mugabe despite Odinga's views. The latter is, however, most likely to use every opportunity to openly criticize Mugabe.

## The United Kingdom

Relations between Zimbabwe and Britain started to deteriorate soon after the British Labour Party, under Prime Minister Tony Blair, came to power in 1997. This coincided with increasing differences between the two governments over the modalities surrounding the funding of the land reform programme. Following the disputed 2000 and 2002 general and presidential elections, Britain imposed sanctions against selected members of the government of Zimbabwe and refused to unconditionally fund the controversial Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Since then, Robert Mugabe has primarily blamed Britain and its allies for all the problems facing Zimbabwe and has successively used it as an election campaign and propaganda tool in extremely vitriolic language. The British Prime Minis-

<sup>51</sup> Raila Odinga compares himself with Morgan Tsvangirai. Both consider themselves as the undeclared winners of the presidential elections in their two respective countries. Equally, he compares Robert Mugabe with Mwai Kibaki as the illegitimate winners of those elections. Odinga preceded Tsvangirai as the victim of a power sharing arrangement, a concept that is increasingly becoming institutionalized as Africa's solution to its election crises.

ter boycotted the December 2007 EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, to avoid a potentially difficult encounter with Mugabe.

Britain's reaction to Zimbabwe's election crisis was predictably forthright. On 11 April 2008 Mugabe described British Prime Minister Gordon Brown as 'a little tiny dot in this world', accusing him of trying to be the 'international community'.<sup>52</sup> Apparently reacting to the delayed announcement of the presidential election results on 21 April 2008, Foreign Secretary David Miliband described the situation in Zimbabwe as a 'constitutional crisis', adding that Mugabe was trying 'to steal the election'.<sup>53</sup> Also on 23 April 2008, Gordon Brown, together with Jacob Zuma, then President of South Africa's ruling ANC, issued a joint statement in which they described the situation in Zimbabwe as a crisis and called for an end to violence and intimidation. Both stressed the importance of respect for the sovereign people of Zimbabwe and the choice they had made at the ballot box. Along with Amnesty International, Brown also called for the imposition of an arms embargo on Zimbabwe.

Britain promised to ensure that the EU maintained the sanctions against some 131 individuals in the ruling elite, including President Mugabe, on the grounds of human rights abuses.<sup>54</sup> It threatened to extend the sanctions to other individuals when necessary. However, it supported the mediation efforts of Presidents Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania in his capacity as the Chairman of AU and Thabo Mbeki, the official SADC mediator.

Reacting to the PSA, Miliband said that his government welcomed the prospect of a turn in the tide of suffering in Zimbabwe. He hoped that the agreement would allow Zimbabwe to chart a new course towards economic recovery and political stability. He stressed that his government would study the details of the agreement, adding that what mattered was not just the words of the agreement but the way in which it would function and the actions and policies that the new government would pursue, and hoped that it would reverse what he referred to as 'the tragic policies and decline of recent years'. In his view, the new government needed to start re-building the country and, if it did so, he promised, Britain and the international community would be quick to support it.<sup>55</sup>

However, while in Luxemburg on 13 October 2008, Miliband condemned what he believed was 'Mugabe's attempted power grab' saying:

I think it is very important that a European signal goes out that we will have no part, and play no part, in supporting a power grab by the Mugabe regime...

52 He made these remarks after briefly meeting Mbeki at State House. The latter had stopped on his way to the Extra-ordinary SADC Summit meeting that had been called for by the late Zambian President Mwanawasa on 12 April 2008.

53 See Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: Zimbabwe Presidential Election 2008.

54 The full list has since grown to include journalists and companies that are accused of having strong allegiances to or links with ZANU(PF).

55 See: *In Quotes: World reaction to power sharing deal signing*: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/mbeki165.18764.html>. (Accessed 15/09/08).

It is important that there be an international united response that says that the results of the Zimbabwean (March 29) elections need to be respected and that a power grab will not be respected.<sup>56</sup>

Britain is expected to continue working with or through Zimbabwe's neighbours to achieve its preferred foreign policy goals in Zimbabwe. Equally, it is likely to continue to provide Zimbabwe with humanitarian assistance, but channelled through NGOs and UN agencies.<sup>57</sup> Its approach towards Zimbabwe will, therefore, remain performance-based and essentially punctuated by deserved rewards and necessary punishments.

### The United States of America

Together with Britain, the USA has been at the forefront of putting pressure on the government of Zimbabwe to reform. On 4 December 2001, the US Congress passed into law the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) that became the cornerstone of US foreign policy towards Zimbabwe. Under this Act, the US preconditions for aid and financing are the restoration of the rule of law, free and fair elections, civilian controlled military and police force, and a commitment to a transparent, equitable and legal land reform programme. The financial sanctions under ZDERA prohibit any US person from engaging in any financial transactions with any person or entity found to be undermining democratic institutions and processes in Zimbabwe. Under ZDERA, Zimbabwe has not benefited from the Africa Growth Opportunity Act, which offers tangible incentives for African countries that open their economies, build free markets and embrace political pluralism.

The USA openly opposed China's shipment of arms to Zimbabwe during the election crisis.<sup>58</sup> As Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer argued, the US did not think it appropriate at the time, given the political upheaval that was occurring in Zimbabwe, for any country to supply weapons to Zimbabwe's security forces. The US Foreign Affairs Chairman Howard Berman also praised the African nations for blocking the shipment of small and light weapons to Zimbabwe.<sup>59</sup> The list of individuals and companies under US targeted sanctions has been regularly

<sup>56</sup> See [www.eubusiness.com](http://www.eubusiness.com), *ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> According to 'Britain and Zimbabwe' (British Embassy, Harare, 2007) Britain annually provides an estimated £40m of humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe. In 2007, it donated a further £8m through the World Food Aid programme.

<sup>58</sup> The Chinese ship *An-Yue Jiang* carried a consignment of weapons destined for Zimbabwe. It was prevented from docking at any South African port by labour unions and pressure groups. Reports that it returned the consignment to China remain unconfirmed.

<sup>59</sup> See Kellarhals, M.D. (Jr), 'US Supports African Stance Against Arms Shipment to Zimbabwe': <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/april/20080422162313dmslahrellek0.3094904.htm> (Accessed 23/04/08)

updated, most recently in November 2008 when four individuals linked to the Mugabe administration were added to the list in reaction to the stalled PSA. Nonetheless, the USA has remained cautiously optimistic about the power sharing agreement. In an interview with Blessing Zulu of VOA News on 17 September 2008, the US Ambassador to Zimbabwe, James McGee, clearly articulated the criteria under which the US would measure the success of the agreement. He called for 'ratcheting up' towards adherence of key principles that include: the restoration of the rule of law, respect for human rights, a crackdown on corruption, and the restoration of a market economy, adding that if the envisaged unity government could show that it is moving to meet the principles set out by the US, 'we will be very pleased with this arrangement'. He added that America's re-engagement with Zimbabwe would be based on performance: 'If this government is moving in a positive direction then our response will be a very positive one. But if the government continues along the same path as previously, our response will be... likewise in that same direction.'<sup>60</sup>

Regardless of the congratulatory message that Mugabe sent to the US President-elect Barack Obama, and given the permanency of American self-interest as well as Obama's determination to succeed where his predecessor failed, ZDERA will remain the cornerstone of US policy towards Zimbabwe. Like the British government, the Obama administration will continue to insist on performance as a necessary precondition for re-engagement with the government of Zimbabwe.

### The People's Republic of China

China has supported ZANU(PF) and, by extension, the government of Zimbabwe, since the onset of the liberation struggle. Its current policy is best understood within the framework of a 'Look East' policy that is largely premised on party-to-party solidarity. China has taken the opportunity provided by Western disengagement to offer itself as an alternative source of no-strings assistance and investment. It claims to adhere to the non-interference norm in its international relations but only to the extent that its strategic self-interests are not significantly compromised. As such, it did not criticize Mugabe or ZANU(PF) or indeed anybody, for the manner in which the harmonized elections and the presidential run-off elections were conducted. However, China was widely criticized for sending the *An-Yue Jiang* to deliver a consignment of ammunition and weapons during the election crisis. The timing of the delivery naturally raised suspicions about China's interests in Zimbabwe.

China has repeatedly vetoed any proposed UN Security Council res-

<sup>60</sup> For a full interview, see <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-09/2008-09-17-voa64.cfm?CFID=5908777&CFTOKEN=73016293> (Accessed 17/09/08)

olution to put pressure on Zimbabwe. The latest instance was after the harmonized elections, when alongside Russia, Vietnam and South Africa, China vetoed a proposed resolution on Zimbabwe that had been co-sponsored by the USA and Britain. Zimbabwe is likely to maintain its heavy reliance on China which, in turn, is also likely to maintain fraternal relations in line with its Africa policy.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Russian Federation**

Russia's ties with Zimbabwe have grown stronger following the unilateral invasion of Iraq by the US-led 'Coalition-of-the-Willing' in March 2003, which coincided with the unprecedented US pressure on Zimbabwe following the 2002 elections. Like China, Russia is strongly opposed to the occasional unilateral tendencies of the US, increasingly favouring multilateralism, which in its weaker position since the end of the Cold War, gives it an assumption of power. Russia has always vetoed any Security Council proposals aimed at putting pressure on Zimbabwe. Indeed, it vetoed one resolution in spite of President Dimitri Medvedev's previous assurances at the 2008 G-8 Summit in Japan that it would not do so. Russia's approach to Zimbabwe at the UN can be read as a reaction to the tendency of the USA (under the presidency of George Bush) to disrespect bilateral arms control and disarmament agreements and show contempt for multilateralism. This approach, coupled with what are interpreted as provocative policies towards countries which once had strong ties with the Soviet Union, such as the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Georgia, Russia is likely to continue to veto any US and UK attempts to put Zimbabwe on the Security Council agenda, but only to the extent that the US maintains its provocative policies towards Russia. However, Russia will at most condemn but not prevent any US and UK unilateral actions against Zimbabwe.

### **The Islamic Republic of Iran**

As with China, Zimbabwe's relations with Iran are part of its 'Look East' policy. Both countries have a common adversary in the West in general but the UK and the US in particular.<sup>62</sup> (Indeed, in 2008, the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice named both Zimbabwe and Iran in a list of so-called 'outlaw states' as 'remaining outposts of tyranny'.) The bilateral

<sup>61</sup> China has been quietly pursuing an aggressive Africa policy as it seeks to acquire minerals and other natural resources.

<sup>62</sup> The US government under president George W. Bush named Zimbabwe, Iran, Iraq and North Korea 'remaining outposts of tyranny'. <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/powell18.12161.html>

relations between the two countries have been growing stronger since Zimbabwe opened its embassy in Teheran in 2003. Iran has assisted in the modernization of Zimbabwe's state television and radio services. It has also invested in various sectors including agriculture, industry, power and energy, and has extended lines of credit at a time of dire need. It endorsed the results of both the 29 March 2008 harmonized election and the presidential run-off election. Predictably, it also hailed the PSA saying it would provide a solution to the challenges facing the country. It has solidly supported Zimbabwe at various international forums including the United Nations where it has called for the immediate lifting of what it considers as 'sanctions against Zimbabwe' so as to expedite the country's economic recovery. With common western adversaries, shared perceptions regarding the contemporary global order, common principles regarding the inviolability of state sovereignty and non-interference, shared values and aspirations, Iran will most likely maintain its friendly stance towards Zimbabwe but only to the extent that its national self-interests are safeguarded.

### Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show that Zimbabwe's 29 March 2008 harmonized election and the subsequent presidential run-off election of 27 June received varied regional and international reaction. Most foreign election observer teams, including the PAN, SEOM, AU, COMESA and the East African Community, endorsed the harmonized elections but not the presidential run-off election. Most Western governments reacted similarly. Only Russia, China, Iran and most African and Third World governments endorsed both. Similarly, the PSA received mixed regional and international reaction. While some saw it as a necessary compromise and significant first step towards taking the country forward, others were cautiously optimistic, avoiding premature celebration. Still, there were those who regarded the PSA as both potentially fragile and unrealistically ambitious given the traditional levels of enmity between ZANU(PF) and MDC-T. The implementation of the PSA was initially stalled, although a power-sharing government was eventually instituted in February 2009. Thus, the potent winds of Zimbabwe's peaceful democratic transition that came with the harmonized elections were effectively blocked by the presidential run-off election and the subsequent SADC-facilitated settlement, the PSA.<sup>63</sup>

Zimbabwe conducted its harmonized elections using its own preferred 'principles and guidelines' partly because the SADC Principles and Guide-

<sup>63</sup> Increasingly becoming the preferred African solution to African political crises such as post-election disputes, power-sharing governments usually disadvantage the winners, substantively reward the losers, and tend to be imposed on the people, regardless of their otherwise democratically expressed will.

lines Governing Democratic Elections are not mandatory. Whilst it may have lost its historically positive reputation as a regional political pacesetter, Zimbabwe has shown that in *realpolitik* the independent sovereign state is the ultimate arbiter in matters of political life and death. In future, other African governments, with assertive sovereignty and determination similar to that of Zimbabwe, are also likely to conduct their own elections in their own preferred style. Both SADC and the AU exhibited an inexcusable lack of commitment to enforcing their own institutional principles on member states. SADC created a false impression that the Zimbabwe election crisis was unique. In doing so, it lost its credibility. It took longer than necessary to solve the post-election Zimbabwe crisis in part because its 'quiet diplomacy' had no benchmarks, deadlines and viable alternatives; the mediator was also visibly biased in favour of one party and against the others. To successfully solve similar future election crises, it is critical that mediators should remain neutral, impartial, honest and trustworthy as well as enjoying public confidence. Equally, there should be alternative approaches to election crisis management. Perhaps, most importantly, future mediators should not be picked from the list of incumbent leaders. Ultimately, the only lasting solution to any election crisis can be one that affords primacy to the freely expressed democratic will of the people rather than the preferences of political gladiators; otherwise, the lives of many citizens will be 'short, nasty and brutish'.