

## ZIMBABWE'S MUGABE AT 90—BUSY AS EVER

By George F. Ward

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Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of IDA's Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses. He is a former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Namibia.

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Chinese President Xi Jinping, center, walks near Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, left, Zimbabwe's first lady Grace Mugabe, second from left, and China's first lady Peng Liyuan, second from right, during a welcome ceremony outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, Monday, Aug. 25, 2014. (Source: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan.)

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Interim President Catherine Samba Panza and French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian met in February. (Source: AP Photo/Jerome Delay.)

### About IDA

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IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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## Orchestrating His Own Legacy

Conventional wisdom has been that the issue of succession to Mugabe would be resolved at the congress of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in December 2014. The two main candidates are considered to be Vice President Joice Mujuru and Justice, Legal, and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa. Each is supported by a faction within the party. As [reported earlier](#) in IDA's Africa Watch, Mugabe has adeptly played the two factions within ZANU-PF against each other. He once asked, "But why should it [succession] be discussed when it's not due? Is it due? I'm still there."

On August 15, Mugabe's 49-year old wife, Grace, a former typist in the president's office who has until now concerned herself chiefly with the family's business interests, was selected by the ruling party's women's league as its [national secretary](#). Once Grace Mugabe is confirmed in that position at the December party congress, she will become a member of the powerful ZANU-PF [politburo](#) and positioned to play a significant political role.

This move has been widely interpreted as orchestrated by President Mugabe, but [analysts differ](#) on his motivation. Some believe that Mugabe wished to dilute the power of Joice Mujuru, who may have been gaining ground in the succession battle. Others speculate that Mugabe is grooming his wife to assume the presidency to safeguard the Mugabe property and business empire. Regardless of the motivation, it seems clear that Robert Mugabe plans to play an active part in formulating his own succession plan.

## Mugabe at the Subregional Helm

While Zimbabweans were still speculating about the purpose of Mugabe's political machinations, the President was in the resort town of Victoria Falls attending the August 17–18 summit of the 15-nation Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). At the meeting, Mugabe took over the role of chairman of SADC for the coming year. Although the importance of this role should not be overstated, Mugabe will chair SADC in any meetings at the head-of-state level, and he will have significant power over the organization's agenda.

Mugabe's assumption of the chairmanship marks his rehabilitation. Six years ago, SADC [mediated](#) a power-sharing deal between Mugabe and his political opponents following disputed elections, and a coalition government was the result. In the years following the mediated deal, SADC became progressively less attentive to the situation in Zimbabwe, and Mugabe consolidated his power. The ZANU-PF won a resounding victory in the July 2013 national elections, and SADC one month later



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called for the lifting of all sanctions on Zimbabwe. Malawian President Joyce Banda, chair of SADC at the time, was [quoted](#) as saying that Zimbabweans had “suffered enough.”

For the most part, the voluble Mugabe was on good behavior at the Victoria Falls summit of SADC. He did manage to [give](#) the summit a theme that borrowed some cumbersome language from ZANU-PF’s 2013 election manifesto. The theme, “SADC Strategy for Economic Transformation: Leveraging the Region’s Diverse Resources for Sustainable Economic and Social Development through Beneficiation and Value Addition,” was not reflected in any concrete results at the summit. If anything, the reverse proved true when South Africa and Namibia declined to sign a new protocol on trade in services that would have mandated the start of removal of barriers to the free movement of services across borders. According to South Africa’s [Daily Maverick](#), “Mugabe wasn’t happy, and he didn’t care who knew it.” South Africa also [frustrated Mugabe](#) by refusing to go along with a proposal for a SADC regional-development fund, reportedly out of suspicion that cash-strapped Mugabe would tap the fund for budget support.

## Sparse Results in China

With hardly a pause in his busy schedule, President Mugabe flew off to Beijing on August 23. He was accompanied by seven of his cabinet ministers. Before Mugabe’s departure, his spokesman [downplayed expectations](#). Media reports that the Chinese government would provide \$4 billion in funding to help the struggling Zimbabwean economy were false, said the spokesman. Officials of the Chinese embassy in Harare were reported as [confirming](#) that negotiations on a financial package were underway, but saying that Beijing needed collateral to justify a loan.

Under Mugabe’s “Look East” policy, [Chinese investment](#) in Zimbabwe has risen, exceeding \$602 million in 2013. Trade between China and Zimbabwe [doubled](#) from 2010 to 2013, reaching \$1.1 billion annually. Despite this increase, Zimbabwe’s “indigenization” law, which requires 51-percent ownership of firms by Zimbabweans, may be an impediment to the relationship with China. [One Harare media source](#) reported that the Zimbabwe government, desperate for funding from China, was planning to award infrastructure projects to Chinese firms without going through the normal public tender process.

The results of Mugabe’s visit to China seemed to bear out the thesis that Beijing is becoming more selective in its approach to Zimbabwe. President Mugabe was accorded all the trappings of a state visit, from a 21-gun salute to meetings with Chinese President Xin Jinping and other senior officials, all of whom lauded the bilateral relationship and Mugabe’s leadership. The concrete results of the trip were nevertheless sparse. Zimbabwean state broadcasting reported that [12 memoranda of understanding](#) between Mugabe’s government and Chinese state and business entities were signed during the trip. These agreements reportedly included planned improvements in the country’s infrastructure, but no significant details were released. In particular, the total potential value of additional Chinese investments was not mentioned.

## Conclusion

Where does all of this activity by Mugabe leave Zimbabwe? The economy is stumbling, and political repression is unrelenting. While Mugabe was in China, [Zimbabwean riot police](#) detained a dozen opposition protesters and beat up others during a demonstration in Harare against high unemployment. With the ZANU-PF party congress approaching in December, the energies of Mugabe and other political leaders are more likely to be focused on the critical succession question than on concrete measures that might place the country on a more positive path. Meanwhile, Mugabe has much to look forward to. If the African Union follows its usual rule for choosing its leader, he will become the [chair](#) of that organization in 2015.

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Interim President Catherine Samba Panza and French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian met in February. (Source: AP Photo/Jerome Delay.)

## The Trigger

A coup in March 2013 deposed former president of CAR Francois Bozizé, himself in power as the result of a coup 10 years earlier. The 2013 coup was orchestrated by a coalition of rebel groups known as Séléka. Their leader, Michel Djotodia, was installed as transitional president. Some residents were [initially sympathetic](#) as Bozizé was not particularly popular and his corruption was well known. As the rebels continued to attack citizens and loot businesses, and casualties piled up, however, the mood quickly turned (see [Africa Watch](#) of November 14, 2013, for additional background).

What began as a power struggle then morphed into a low-grade civil war. On one side are the Séléka rebels (or ex-Séléka as they sometimes prefer to be called), composed largely but not exclusively of Muslims from CAR, Chad, and Sudan. On the other is the “anti-balaka” militia, a loose organization of local self-defense groups that had mobilized in response to the many egregious offenses committed by Séléka rebels. The anti-balaka are largely Christian (the population of CAR is more than 50 percent Christian) and are rumored to be supported by Bozizé, who is living in exile, with his whereabouts unknown.

The situation [spiraled out of control](#), and as it became apparent that Djotodia could not contain the fighting, he was [forced to resign](#) in January 2014. His resignation was strongly encouraged by Chadian president Idriss Déby, who has a long history of interfering in CAR's politics.

Catherine Samba Panza was appointed interim president shortly thereafter. Since then, there have been two attempts at fashioning an inclusive government that incorporates representatives from multiple groups, including Séléka and anti-balaka, but neither has been successful at this point.

## Prospects for Peace

An interim [peace-agreement was signed](#) in late July. The Séléka rebels agreed to drop their demand that the country be partitioned into two territories—the north with a Muslim majority and the south with a Christian majority—but they reasserted this demand in August. International peacekeepers have been present in CAR since December 2013 in an attempt to quell the violence. Former colonial power [France has contributed 2,000 troops](#). The African Union (AU) has also provided approximately 6,000 peacekeepers, although their actions in CAR have caused some [controversy due to alleged human rights abuses committed by troops](#). In April, the [United Nations approved a deployment](#) of approximately 12,000 soldiers and police, [7,600 of whom](#) are expected to be on duty by mid-[September](#). Many of the UN peacekeepers will be “re-hatted” from the AU force. It is hoped that this new and more robust deployment will be better able to promote a peaceful resolution.



Complicating matters, however, the two contending groups in the CAR are beset with organizational issues and factional infighting. Both groups, due to the piecemeal and organic way in which they were formed, lack true organizational structures and have no centralized authority. Very little is known about the structure and leadership of the anti-balaka. Within Séléka are [multiple factions](#), all vying for power. [Seventeen people were killed](#) in clashes in late August between Séléka rebels from different ethnic groups. Factionalization makes the peace process even more difficult as it frustrates attempts at identifying who should participate in peace talks and who has the authority to negotiate a credible commitment on behalf of the rebels. At the beginning of September, hundreds of rebels reportedly [departed](#) the southern capital city of Bangui and are heading north for unknown reasons.

Meanwhile, an illegal economy is flourishing. A gold mine outside Bambari, in the center of the country, is illegally controlled by Séléka fighters who took over from a Canadian mining firm that fled the country amid the fighting. This mine alone produces an estimated [\\$350,000 worth of gold per month](#) (a collapse killed [at least 37 miners](#) in August). In a country with few job prospects, these revenues provide motivation for some rebels to perpetuate the conflict.

While the groups are [seemingly](#) mobilized around religious divisions, until recently there were few [overtly religious demands](#). Moreover, although the leadership of Séléka is Muslim and that of anti-balaka Christian, the fighters are not necessarily so aligned. In addition, despite the long history of coups and political violence in CAR, there is no history of religious tensions, and [religious leaders](#) from all faiths have been working together since the conflict broke out to bring peace to the country.

Nonetheless, thousands have died and hundreds of thousands have been displaced since fighting began in 2013. And this conflict may have helped to create a new religious fault line in CAR where there previously was none, as those affected by the conflict may come to associate wartime atrocities with specific religious groups. There are [accusations from both sides](#) regarding the depravity of the other. Taken together, the fractured nature of the rebels, the revenues from natural resources that fund the conflict, and the lack of capacity of the interim government make the prospects for peace in the near term unlikely. However, if the UN peacekeeping deployment is able to provide the security and stability necessary for the interim government to re-establish control of the country, including its resources, the situation could improve.

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