

## **Mugabe Stokes Diplomatic War**

**Author:** [Obert Marufu](#)

President says his western critics will not be invited to monitor upcoming elections. President Robert Mugabe this week upped the stakes in his diplomatic war with the United States and Britain after he declared in a televised national address that only “friendly and objective members of the international community” would be invited to observe the country’s harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for March next year.

In his state of the nation address on December 4, he repeated his message to what government officials claim was a million war veterans and other party supporters who marched in Harare on November 30 to support Mugabe’s endorsement as the ruling ZANU- PF party’s sole presidential candidate.

Mugabe told the “Million Man/Woman” marchers at Zimbabwe Grounds in the poor suburb of Highfield that the government would not tolerate any form of violence during next year’s elections. He also said only friendly countries would be invited to observe the polls, pitting mainly his ZANU-PF against the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC.

The MDC, currently engaged in protracted negotiations with the ruling party on how to level the electoral playing field and end the country’s eight-year political stalemate and economic decline, has made the issue of international observers a key factor among its demands.

Unfortunately, the MDC is viewed with suspicion among leaders of African and many Third World countries and appears to enjoy unqualified support only from Europe and the US - whom Mugabe accuses of trying to oust his regime to install their puppets.

South African president Thabo Mbeki, who was mandated by the Southern African Development Community, SADC, in March to mediate in the talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC, has pledged free and fair elections.

Mugabe gave special praise during his televised state of the nation address to Mbeki for the ongoing talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC, which, he said, “have ushered in the dawn of a new era of constructive engagement across the political divide”. He said this had been achieved despite “sustained manipulation and arm-twisting manouvres cunningly spearheaded by Britain”.

In a speech largely devoted to a soul-searching admission of the country’s myriad problems, such as shortages of fuel and power, rural poverty and low productivity on newly-resettled farms, the brain-drain and lack of capacity-utilisation, Mugabe also had a few telling comments for his western “detractors”.

He said a sinister campaign by Britain to isolate Zimbabwe, “including the recent attempt to bar us from attending the European Union-Africa summit” in Portugal, was disintegrating, allowing the country an opportunity for “fruitful engagement with other nations”. Portugal invited Zimbabwe to attend the December 8-9 summit to discuss “trade, peace and security, climate change, development aid and governance” against protests by Britain, whose prime minister, Gordon Brown, said he would not share a platform with Mugabe because of his rampant human rights violations.

Mugabe also appeared to have been angered by remarks attributed to the new US ambassador to Zimbabwe, James McGee, that the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act limiting the US's dealings with the southern African nation mainly to humanitarian assistance would not be scrapped even if Mugabe won "free and fair elections".

McGee said last week, "United States policy on Zimbabwe is not about free and fair elections alone. That is only one of the principles outlined in the law. There is a need to address all the principles before the law can be repealed, such as human rights and the restoration of the rule of law."

In what analysts said was a rebuke of the US ambassador, Mugabe this week said as Zimbabwe heads towards harmonised elections in 2008 "let the message ring clearly to our detractors that as a sovereign nation we will not brook any interference in our domestic affairs. We will hold our elections guided by our constitution and laws as we have always done".

He added, "As is our tradition, we will invite friendly nations and objective members of the international community to observe the elections. Those of our people who wish to go about campaigning should do so in atmosphere of peace and shun activities that may leave behind a bitter aftertaste. Government has at its disposal the means to deal firmly with anyone seeking to engage in acts of violence."

A political analyst in Harare said it was difficult to trust Mugabe, given the electoral violence that characterised past elections. But he added that those calling for free and fair elections were opening themselves up to attacks of hypocrisy in raising issues that are not raised in other countries in the region where the electoral process is overtly flawed and violence is endemic, such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"Why is nobody talking about sanctions against Nigeria and the DRC despite their clearly flawed recent elections yet they have been left to forge ahead the best they can?" he asked.

"We need to watch closely what happens as we move towards the elections, whether Mugabe's supporters act according to what he is saying regarding violence."

He predicted a prolonged standoff between Britain and the US on the one hand and most African countries on the other over the elections.

"Most African nations will endorse whatever outcome emerges," said the analyst. "But Britain and the US will find themselves standing alone because they have already indicated by their remarks the outcome they want - something Africans and other Third World nations will obviously resist."

Obert Marufu is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe.

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