

Madagascar: Stumbling at the first hurdle?

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CRISIS OUT OF NOWHERE

Two years ago there were not many people who would have predicted the political crisis that was to bring the giant island state of Madagascar to the brink of civil war and institutional disintegration. The immediate occasion for the crisis was the disputed result of the first round of the presidential election held on 16 December 2001, yet only a few months earlier there had been a general consensus that, for better or worse, President Didier Ratsiraka was virtually certain to win another term of office. His prospective opponents were the same uninspiring figures who had tried time and again, without much success, to make a mark in national politics. Then, unexpectedly, on 5 August 2001 the mayor of Antananarivo, the capital, Marc Ravalomanana, declared his candidacy and fresh life was breathed into the contest.

Ratsiraka had laid the foundations for his re-election with some care. Since his return to the presidency in December 1996, when he narrowly defeated then incumbent Albert Zafy in the second round of voting, he and his party, AREMA (*Association pour la renaissance de Madagascar*), had worked assiduously to entrench their patronage and organisational networks on a national basis. In this they were greatly assisted by the fragmentary nature of Madagascan party politics and the general ineptitude of the opposition. Having cobbled together a parliamentary majority, which was reinforced during the legislative elections of May 1998, Ratsiraka introduced what appeared at first sight to be a sweeping measure of decentralisation, creating six, nominally autonomous, provincial authorities in 1998. The public was less than overwhelmed by this innovation, which had the effect of reducing parliamentary control over the executive and passed by referendum with less than 51% approval. The provinces in effect provided a measure of greater control to AREMA, which secured nearly 60% of the

vote in the provincial elections in December 2000 and all six governorships in the indirect election of June 2001. In the Senate, too, AREMA enjoyed absolute domination following the elections of March 2001. Thus encouraged, and possibly with a degree of complacency, on 26 June 2001 Ratsiraka decided to announce his candidacy for the presidential elections due in December 2001.¹

Ratsiraka's campaign was based on two broad themes. First there was his aspiration to be regarded as the father of the nation, a symbol of unity in a state he ruled as a military leader from 1975 to 1993 and again, in more democratic guise, from 1996. Second was the remarkable turnaround in the Madagascan economy, growing at annual rates of some 5% since 1999, despite extremely unfavourable weather conditions. Though Ratsiraka claimed credit for much of this macro-economic success, the underlying reasons were to be found in the policies implemented by technocratic prime ministers assisted by the finance ministry and the central bank. These had led to sharp increases in foreign direct investment in Madagascar's export processing zones, particularly in the textiles sector, which was able to exploit the island's cheap labour. Debt service had also fallen drastically, following Madagascar's accession to the

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Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative early in 2001.² But Madagascar's impressive macro-economic growth rates, though they had benefited the townspeople were yet to be reflected in improvements in the living standards of the population in the rural areas, particularly in the areas of health and education, and some 70% of the island's 15 million people remained mired in poverty.³

Marc Ravalomanana's announcement on 5 August 2001 that he was entering the lists caused some consternation in Ratsiraka's camp.⁴ The new candidate was largely an unknown factor in political terms, and represented a distinct break with the past in terms of

personality and style. At 52, he was 13 years Ratsiraka's junior, with a dynamism that contrasted markedly with the ailing figure of the incumbent. His life story was that of the self-made multi-millionaire businessman who had entered politics only in 1999 to campaign successfully for the mayorship of the capital, at the head of the 'I Love Madagascar Movement', TIM (*Tiako-i-Madagaskara*). He was now able to place before the electorate his successful record as mayor of Antananarivo in his campaign to secure the most senior political position in the country. The city had been cleared of rubbish, new roads had been built, street lighting provided and more police put on the streets, resulting in a sharp decline in crime levels. The urban renewal had also seen a building boom and the erection of a dozen modern supermarkets, adding to the profile of the mayor, whose Tiko dairy and other food products featured prominently on their shelves. Nor was Ravalomanana's electoral appeal based simply on the material aspects of life. He was well known to the public as a fervent Christian, which stood him in good stead among the rural poor.⁵

By early October 2001 opinion polls showed Ravalomanana to be ahead of Ratsiraka.⁶ By December Norbert Ratsirahonana of the AVI (*Ny asa vita no ifampitsara*), a former prime minister and respected elder statesman, had withdrawn from the race and announced his backing for Ravalomanana, as had a number of leaders of other smaller parties. This support was to prove decisive in consolidating support across the island for the mayor.⁷ The only consideration that gave heart to Ratsiraka's camp on the eve of the polls was that the small-town and rural electorate might discount the newcomer and vote as usual for the incumbent.⁸

The election campaign was marred by isolated incidents of violence, and administrative arrangements were unsatisfactory. There was also concern about the accuracy of the electoral roll, which suggested that the number of registered voters on the island had declined inexplicably by some two million in the past five years.⁹ Though officials were unable to provide a convincing explanation for this apparent anomaly, it may well have reflected a growing public disenchantment with a political class short on constructive ideas but experienced in milking their privileged positions for private benefit.¹⁰

THE COUNT

Results from the capital and other major towns were the first to be announced, and showed that Ravalomanana had made substantial early gains, taking almost 80% of the votes cast in the capital and a majority in other cities. As the days passed, and results began to trickle in from the vast rural areas,

Ratsiraka was able to make some inroads on his principal opponent's lead, and the discussion now centred on whether Ravalomanana would manage to secure the 50% necessary to win on the first round.¹¹

On 28 December 2001 the preliminary results released by the interior ministry indicated that a second round would be necessary pitting Ravalomanana, who had won 46.49% of the vote to Ratsiraka's 40.64%. Their nearest rival was ex-president Albert Zafy with 5.29%. The official tally indicated that 4,230,153 people had cast their ballots out of a registered electorate of 6,326,627, a turnout of 66.86%, which was extremely high in comparison with recent elections. These figures were starkly at variance with those produced by Ravalomanana's support committee which claimed 53.32% against Ratsiraka's 35.54%. In essence, they claimed that Ratsiraka's vote count had been expanded by the fraudulent addition of some 400,000 bogus votes. The implication was that ballot boxes might have been tampered with during their long journey from remote polling stations, and there were suggestions that some

2,500 phantom stations had been used to manipulate the result. By Ravalomanana's supporters' reckoning, which was supported by the findings of local election monitors, the actual turnout had been around 57.3%.¹²

Even before the High Constitutional Court pronounced on the validity of the results, however, the mood in the capital, Antananarivo, where Ravalomanana had won an overwhelming majority, was already one of premature celebration and anticipation. By 4 January the celebrations had assumed an air of menace, and for days afterwards tens of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital to demand that Ravalomanana's victory be recognised.¹³

By 16 January the High Constitutional Court had still not ratified the election results, but instead chose to ask the National Electoral Council (NEC) to conduct a recount. This option was rejected immediately by Ravalomanana, who insisted that the court itself conduct the recount, claiming that the NEC was under government control.¹⁴ Ravalomanana's objections notwithstanding, the NEC proceeded with a recount which made minor adjustments to the figures released by the interior ministry. The conclusion remained essentially the same, however, that neither Ravalomanana nor Ratsiraka had received an absolute majority, and on 25 January the High Constitutional Court ruled that a second round would be held, to be contested by these two candidates. The next ballot was scheduled for 24 February 2002.¹⁵

This turn of events was greeted with dismay in Ravalomanana's camp and a series of massive protest rallies began in the capital on 28 January 2002

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inaugurating an indefinite general strike and culminating in a public demonstration in the central square attended by some 500,000 people.¹⁶ By now the UN Security Council had taken note of developments, which it saw as having the potential to undermine peace and stability in the region. The president of the UNSC issued an appeal to both parties to comply with all constitutional, electoral and legal requirements and asked that the elections be conducted fairly and in a transparent manner in the presence of international observers. This was followed shortly by a similar appeal from Amara Essy, secretary-general to the Organisation of African Unity.¹⁷ The French government, too, urged that the second ballot be held, advice that was also rejected by other opposition figures who had rallied to Ravalomanana's cause.¹⁸ The 29th saw another massive rally in the streets of the capital as the general strike moved into its second day.¹⁹

The only concession Ravalomanana was now willing to make was to offer an end to the general strike if the government would permit international monitors to check the results of the first round, a distinct improbability as Ratsiraka had refused to allow foreigners to observe the vote.²⁰

On 4 February Ravalomanana repeated his refusal to contest a second round until the High Constitutional Court itself addressed the discrepancies between the official figures and those compiled by his supporters. The following day Antananarivo's population went on strike, and huge demonstrations resumed in the capital.²¹ By now it was apparent that the continued unrest and work stoppages would cost the country dear and damage its chances of prolonging the remarkable growth rates of the previous few years. The IMF and World Bank estimated that the strikes were costing as much as US\$14 million a day and that the first 10 days had wiped out the gains made under the HIPC initiative.²² The army minister warned that the security forces would not stand by while the country was reduced to ruins.²³

On the 7th Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, made a personal appeal for a peaceful and constitutional resolution of the crisis. Entreaties and threats made no impact on the resolve of the Ravalomanana camp, however, and as this became apparent the international community decided to take a hand, with Francophone parliamentarians and the Swiss government offering to play the role of honest broker between the two protagonists.²⁴ This attempt at intervention came none too soon, for Ratsiraka's supporters had begun to react to the situation in Antananarivo by establishing an armed blockade on the road linking the capital to the country's major port

of Taomasina some 200km away, thus cutting off the supply of vital imports, especially fuel.²⁵

ENTER THE OAU

It was against this background of rising tensions that Amara Essy arrived in Madagascar to hold meetings with the leaders of the rival camps and other contestants of the first round. He found that while Ratsiraka was fully prepared to contest a second round as dictated by the High Constitutional Court, Ravalomanana was disputing the Court's neutrality and independence and persisting with his demand that the votes of the first round be checked. At this point Essy warned Ravalomanana's camp that, in terms of the Algiers Decision of July 1999 and the Lomé Declaration of July 2000, the OAU would not tolerate any irregular change of government. He also advised that the second round be postponed to allow for its proper organisation.²⁶

On 13 February 2002, reinforced by the arrival of several other senior dignitaries, including the UN assistant secretary for political affairs, Ibrahima Fall, Essy arranged a direct meeting between Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana, at which he achieved an agreement in

Essy warned Ravalomanana's camp that the OAU would not tolerate any irregular change of government

principle that the second round would be postponed, international observers invited and the National Electoral Commission reorganised. A 10-member joint commission was also established to discuss in the presence of the UN's representative those of Ravalomanana's demands on which no consensus could be reached: the verification of the first round votes; the establishment of a transitional government and the reorganisation of the High Constitutional Court. This attained, Essy left the island on the 14th, leaving his assistant

secretary-general for political affairs, Saïd Djinnit, to chair the joint committee at its own request in deliberations that lasted from the 13th to the 19th. Some progress was made in narrowing the gap between the parties, and although large differences remained, the joint committee was prepared to continue talks under the aegis of the OAU.²⁷

Yet even as diplomatic engagement continued, elements on both sides of the political divide began to agitate for more radical solutions. It is one thing to mobilise mass support on the streets but, as Ravalomanana was to discover on a number of occasions, it is quite another to urge moderation and reason upon crowds once their emotions have been engaged in one's cause. Ratsiraka probably found himself in much the same position vis-à-vis his own supporters, who were continuing to erect roadblocks to isolate the capital. A vacillation between demagoguery and dialogue continued to characterise the crisis as it now unfolded and on 18 February Ravalomanana made an appeal to his followers to

dismantle these obstacles, although inevitably this would lead to clashes at a delicate stage of negotiations. In addition his lieutenants made use of this mass rally to urge an immediate withdrawal from negotiations and pressed Ravalomanana to form a government forthwith. Since one of those most prominent in advising extreme action was one of the five members of the joint committee still supposedly negotiating under the auspices of the OAU, this did not augur well.²⁸

Two days later, Ravalomanana addressed a crowd of some 500,000 supporters in the capital, announcing that the crisis had gone on too long and that he was declaring himself president. The accuracy of his claim that every possible recourse to justice had been exhausted was open to question; certainly this was not a view shared by Amara Essy, who issued an immediate warning of the implications of such a step, and called for a continuation of the deliberations being conducted under the auspices of the OAU. Ravalomanana's actions flew directly in the face of agreements apparently reached on the postponement and conditions of a second round.²⁹

The following morning, 21 February, the Ratsiraka government at last reacted to condemn Ravalomanana's stated intentions, having been strangely silent in the face of the mounting popular challenge. Others among the defeated first-round candidates also appealed to Ravalomanana to reconsider, and for a day it seemed that prudence might prevail. On the 22nd, however, urged on by hundreds of thousands of his supporters, and in front of a crowd of tens of thousands in the national stadium, including judges and church leaders, Ravalomanana took the fateful step, declared himself president and had himself sworn in.³⁰

This dramatic turn of events was greeted by a wave of sharp condemnation from the UN, the OAU, France and the United States, among others. Ratsiraka's response was to impose a state of emergency including a ban on public demonstrations. Though this had the immediate effect of snuffing out the carnival atmosphere in Antananarivo, there was no sign that Ravalomanana's supporters would succumb to threats and, indeed, more speculation on what would happen should the army persist in its strange stance of "loyal neutrality".³¹

The OAU now moved swiftly to attempt a resuscitation of dialogue. Following an emergency meeting of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, at which Ravalomanana's actions were condemned as "a flagrant violation of constitutional legality", a contact group was formed under the leadership of the ex-president of Cape Verde, Antonio Mascarenhas Monteiro, to visit Madagascar and propose to the two protagonists ways in which a peaceful solution to the crisis might be found. At the heart of these proposals lay the idea of

forming a government of national reconciliation to prepare the ground for a return to normality and the holding of a second round of presidential elections in six months time.³²

But by the time the OAU contact group arrived in Madagascar (on 6 March), however, attitudes on the ground had hardened considerably.

CIVIL WAR?

By the end of February 2002 the population of Antananarivo had rallied behind Ravalomanana with an almost desperate intensity, impatient to defy Ratsiraka's edict. Ravalomanana, protected by a massive crowd around his house, told interviewers that he was eager to legalise his position as president by means of a referendum.³³ In the meantime, however, he appointed as his 'prime minister' Jacques Sylla, a lawyer and former foreign minister. Other 'cabinet' appointments would follow shortly. Ratsiraka's camp appeared to be forced on to the defensive by the persistent boldness of his opponent. Prime minister Tantely Andrianarivo fled the capital and the ministers of posts and telecommunications and of foreign affairs submitted their resignations. On the streets of the capital, however, Ratsiraka's supporters were showing rather more resolve, which resulted in bloody clashes and running battles.³⁴

The embattled President Ratsiraka now made a rash attempt to retrieve a deteriorating situation by declaring martial law in Antananarivo and appointing General Raveloarison as military governor, with instructions to enforce the curfew. The general showed admirable sense by attempting no such thing, being fully aware that this would have led to a bloodbath. The net effect of Ratsiraka's actions was merely to demonstrate his failing power, and on 1 March 2002 Ravalomanana emphasised this by naming the remainder of his 'cabinet'.³⁵ The immediate question now was whether the new 'ministers' would be prevented by the military from occupying their offices in the capital. As it happened there was a sudden deployment of large numbers of troops, but these made no effort to confront the thousands of demonstrators who accompanied the new appointees to their places of work.³⁶

The army having been conspicuous in its moderation, Ratsiraka's principal hope now lay in the continued loyalty of the governors of five of the six autonomous provinces who, on 5 March 2002 signed an agreement designating the eastern port city of Taomasina as their capital. They added that they would maintain the blockade of Antananarivo to cut off vital supplies.³⁷ Suddenly the media was full of warnings of a descent into full-scale civil war. Despite all the talk of war, however, the army remained remarkably quiescent, and on 7 March Ravalomanana's supporters took over the defence ministry without opposition. Ratsiraka's defence minister promptly resigned and, the blockade

excepted, the initiative seemed to have passed to Ravalomanana, a situation that did little to assist the OAU mediators.³⁸

This, then, was how matters had developed by the time the OAU contact group made their appearance on the island on 6 March.³⁹ During the week the OAU mission spent in Madagascar it formulated proposals for the establishment of a government of national reconciliation, which would restore normality and prepare for new elections. By the time the group left on 13 March, however, neither party had responded to this proposal. Nor did the OAU succeed in organising a personal meeting between the two rivals. The OAU Council of Ministers now met to review the situation, once again urging a resumption of dialogue and an avoidance of inflammatory behaviour.⁴⁰

Despite these pleas, levels of violence continued to increase and on 14 March 2002 several pro-Ravalomanana demonstrators were killed by security forces in Ratsiraka's Taomasina stronghold. There were also clear manifestations of the ethnic tensions between the Merinas of the central highlands and the *côtiers*, or coastal people, that had always formed the background of the dispute over power. The Merinas, a people of Malay origin on the central plateau, had dominated the last few centuries of Madagascar's pre-colonial history, but independent Madagascar's politics had been run principally by the coastal peoples, mostly of African descent. Fortunately, and despite the efforts of some of the protagonists, the ethnic tinder failed to ignite fully during the crisis, which explains the avoidance of full-scale communal conflict.⁴¹

Ravalomanana now proceeded to appoint his own defence chiefs, and on 15 March 2002 Jacques Sylla occupied the prime minister's palace, though not without violence.⁴² This incident led the army to make its first call for direct dialogue, an appeal that Ravalomanana felt strong enough to reject.⁴³ He also felt sufficiently assured to call off the two-month strike, though many businesses found it difficult to resume operations in the face of the continuing blockade.⁴⁴ And though his dismissal of the five provincial governors loyal to Ratsiraka went unheeded, on 29 March General Raveloarison resigned as military governor of Antananarivo, admitting that his mission had been futile.⁴⁵

The beginning of April 2002 saw a worsening of the security situation as two bridges linking the capital to the southern ports were blown up. By now shortages in the capital were becoming acute and tempers shorter. There were increasing incidents of sporadic violence and the rumour mills were spinning stories of impending civil war.⁴⁶ Meanwhile there had been important developments on the legal front: six of the

nine judges on the High Constitutional Court (HCC) had their nominations annulled by the Supreme Court, rendering the rulings of that body null and void. This opened the way for the reinstatement of members of those HCC members replaced by Ratsiraka on the eve of the December polls. The Supreme Court's administrative chamber now issued an order for the results of the first round of voting to be retabulated.⁴⁷

DAKAR I

With the encouragement of Amara Essy, Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade issued an invitation for the rival presidents to meet in Dakar, where a summit was being held to discuss the financing of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Eventually the two were induced to meet on 18 April 2002 in the presence of Essy, Wade, the presidents of Mozambique, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire and Ibrahima Fall of the UN. At the end of the meeting the two signed what became known as the Dakar Agreement. This consisted of five articles, and took into account the order of the High Court regarding an audit of the first round results. The parties agreed that in the event of there not being an outright winner in the recount, a popular referendum would be held to decide between the two leading candidates, organised by the UN, OAU and European Community within six months. Also, in the event of the first round being indecisive a transitional government of national reconciliation would be installed, largely by mutual agreement. A High Transition Council would be established to oversee the process, with Ravalomanana at its head, second in protocol only to the president.

An independent electoral commission would replace the existing national body. And, finally, both parties undertook to ensure the free movement of goods and persons the cessation of acts or threats of violence and the dismantling of barricades. The press, understandably, was effusive in its praise for what it called Wade's diplomatic coup.⁴⁸

Madagascans, though hopeful, were a little more circumspect, being more familiar with the local situation.⁴⁹ The first intimation that all was not well was when the provincial governors refused to dismantle the roadblocks until Ratsiraka had been re-installed in power. For his part, Ravalomanana declined to stand down until the recount had been completed. Incidents of violence between soldiers aligned with the rival camps, more dynamiting of bridges and reinforcement of barricades indicated that the spirit of Dakar was decidedly absent on the island.⁵⁰

Signs of further trouble came with a petition from Ratsiraka to the High Constitutional Court seeking the dismissal of four of the HCC's judges because of bias.

Ratsiraka made a rash attempt to retrieve a deteriorating situation by declaring martial law in Antananarivo

The suit was dismissed on the grounds that by signing the Dakar Agreement, Ratsiraka had implicitly recognised the validity of the current HCC's constitution and jurisdiction. On returning to Madagascar on 28 April 2002, Ratsiraka announced that he was opposed to a recount, and wanted to proceed directly to a referendum, since he continued to deny the legal competence of the HCC to re-examine the votes.⁵¹ His five governors also began to talk of secession should the recount go against their candidate, though this may have been more a reflection of their desire to retain their positions of power than out of loyalty to the incumbent.⁵² The following day the HCC declared that Marc Ravalomanana had won the first round with a clear majority of 51.46% to Ratsiraka's 35.9%. The latter immediately rejected this ruling, citing a number of legal objections to the constitution and competence of the HCC, not least because four of its members had attended Ravalomanana's 'inauguration' on 22 February. At this juncture, and admittedly with the benefit of hindsight, the OAU might have reminded Ratsiraka that his signature of the Dakar Agreement implied his acceptance of the role and competence of the HCC. Thus might further difficulties and complications have been avoided and organisational embarrassment spared. Yet no such pressure seems to have been applied, and Essy publicly expressed doubts about the way in which the recount had been conducted.⁵³ To some observers it appeared that the OAU was unnecessarily, even if unwittingly, undermining the Dakar Agreement it had helped broker.⁵⁴

RE-ENTER THE OAU

Despite these public concerns, an OAU ministerial delegation flew to Madagascar from 2 to 4 May to consult the rival presidents and urge their compliance with the agreement. In discussions with Ratsiraka they adopted the curious position that since the first phase of the Dakar Agreement—the recount—had not resulted in a solution, the next phase should be implemented: the institution of a transitional arrangement to organise a referendum. By implication they seem to have accepted Ratsiraka's technical and legal objections to the recount.⁵⁵

The following day the OAU delegation met Ravalomanana and his principal lieutenants.⁵⁶ The leader of the delegation, Senegal's foreign minister, Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, expressed to him their concern at the damage being done to the country by the protracted political crisis, and then proceeded to make several remarks, the interpretation of which is problematic. On the one hand, he urged Ravalomanana to respect the constitutional provisions for a change of government, but then added that the legal and judicial aspects of the case were not central to the accord reached in Dakar. The primary objective of the Dakar Agreement, according to him, was finding a comprehensive political solution, and he went on to

say that since the execution of the recount had not been acceptable to both sides that issue should have fallen away. In the circumstances, the delegation argued, it was necessary to move on to the second phase, an internationally monitored referendum. Certainly they hoped that Ravalomanana would take no action to affect the process, and in particular that his presidential investiture would be postponed.⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, Ravalomanana's camp was inclined to a different interpretation of what had been agreed at Dakar. They were of the opinion that the first phase of the agreement had been concluded with the comparative recount and the announcement of the new results at the end of April. This made redundant the second phase of the agreement. They urged that pressure be brought to bear on Ratsiraka's supporters to dismantle the barricades isolating the capital in compliance with article five of the Dakar Agreement. They also requested that the OAU recognise the new government, and that it should oppose any attempt by the governors of the autonomous provinces to secede, as they were now threatening.⁵⁸

The visiting delegation's position, however, was supported by three of the other presidential candidates eliminated in the first round who also found the reconstitution of the HCC problematic. They were at pains to remind the delegation that this issue was a test case for the OAU, and that the organisation should take a firm stand against recognition of the Ravalomanana government.⁵⁹

The delegation left Antananarivo on 4 May 2002 and two days later, their express request notwithstanding, Ravalomanana was sworn in as president for the second time, at a ceremony attended by foreign diplomats, including representatives of France and the United States. Despite these signs that the international community, in contrast to the OAU, was beginning to shift its weight slowly behind the new man, Ratsiraka's camp immediately refused to recognise Ravalomanana and also rejected the government sworn in a week later under the premiership of Jacques Sylla.⁶⁰ Further indications that Ratsiraka's position was weakening came as more than 20 parliamentarians from his AREMA party attended the first session of the National Assembly on 7 May 2002. The following day Ratsiraka's defence minister announced that he recognised Ravalomanana's presidency and that he was resigning in favour of his appointed successor.⁶¹

As plans for secession were laid and more bridges were destroyed the OAU continued in its efforts to mediate some kind of political settlement that would ease the growing tensions on the island. President Wade lent his support and invited the two protagonists to meet in Dakar in mid-May, an offer they failed to take up. Though Ravalomanana's envoys travelled to Senegal to plead his cause with Wade, the latter refused to be drawn into a partisan stance.⁶²

Following the return to Addis Ababa of the OAU's ministerial delegation it was decided to convene a summit of the Central Organ, with a view to supporting the Dakar process, and sending a message to the international community that it should do nothing to undermine the organisation's efforts, in particular by recognising Ravalomanana's regime. Yet on 10 May Norway became the first country to do precisely that, followed shortly by Switzerland.⁶³

DAKAR II

The Central Organ summit scheduled for 22 May was postponed at the last minute, however, the relevant heads of state being unable to consider the issue at such short notice. President Wade also preferred to continue with efforts to revive the Dakar talks. His efforts were supported now by President Bongo of Gabon who invited his Senegalese counterpart to Libreville for a meeting on 4 June with Amara Essy and the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin. These discussions culminated in a serious appeal to Ravalomanana and Ratsiraka to attend another meeting in Dakar on 8-9 June.⁶⁴

By then the situation had deteriorated further, as both sides began to calculate the military forces they could muster.⁶⁵ Probably recognising the increasing danger of full-scale civil war, and unwilling to yield the international initiative to his rival, both men arrived in Senegal for what became known as Dakar II. The seriousness of the situation was underlined by the presence of the presidents not only of Senegal, but of Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo-Brazzaville and Burkina Faso, along with Amara Essy and the UN secretary-general's personal representative, Ibrahima Fall.⁶⁶ Yet on the ground the balance of power had undergone a significant shift, for on Friday 7 June General Rajaonson, the army chief of staff, formally handed over control of the armed forces to Ravalomanana's appointee General Rawafimandy. Likewise, command of the gendarmerie passed to Ravalomanana's camp. As he inspected the troops at the handing-over ceremony, Ravalomanana said there was now no turning back, and ordered the soldiers to dismantle the barricades cutting off the capital from the ports.⁶⁷

The following day the presidential claimants arrived in Dakar, in aircraft supplied by the French government. President Wade and his team held protracted but separate meetings with the two men. Ravalomanana indicated that he rested his case on the decision of the High Constitutional Court, which had given him popular legitimacy. Ratsiraka, for his part, indicated a willingness to stand by the Dakar I agreement, which he interpreted as calling for new presidential elections, a position totally unacceptable to Ravalomanana. In a desperate effort to break this deadlock the OAU

facilitators proposed a new strategy. This suggested that legislative elections be held, preferably before the end of the year but by May 2003 at the latest. Should Ravalomanana's party win, then Ratsiraka would have to recognise his legitimacy; should Ratsiraka win then a referendum should be held to choose between the two men as president. In the interim, there should be a transitional government in which Ravalomanana would head the High Transition Council and select the prime minister and the ministers of the interior and finance. Ratsiraka would appoint the other three "sovereignty" ministers. Other cabinet posts would be divided equally between the two parties. In the meantime, the OAU Committee of Heads of State Facilitators undertook to establish an independent national electoral commission. Under the proposed arrangements the prime minister-designate would represent Madagascar at all international levels, and a request would be made for the release of the country's foreign assets. Both parties were urged to remove barricades, dismantle militias, cease all forms of violence and free all those arrested since the beginning of the crisis.⁶⁸

Ravalomanana and Ratsiraka headed home the following day, without agreement having been reached, but with the former now confirmed in a stronger position, especially as his armed forces began to increase their pressure. Outside of the OAU, the diplomatic consensus appeared to be that the failure of the Dakar talks, though not unexpected, opened the way for members of the international community to recognise the new government.⁶⁹

Apparently heedless of his rapidly weakening position, Ratsiraka adopted a defiant stance, allowing Ravalomanana to seize the moral high ground by promising to consider the OAU proposal. On 11 June Ratsiraka declared

that his camp would go on the offensive, as the best means of defence, yet within days it had become apparent that the military tide was moving inexorably against him, as Ravalomanana's forces seized a third province without resistance.⁷⁰

On the 13th, Ratsiraka suddenly flew to France with his immediate family, ostensibly to seek a solution to the crisis, but probably in the hope of activating the nascent goodwill of President Chirac. He denied that he was fleeing the island and indicated that he was preparing to meet the OAU in Libreville, Gabon. Madagascar state television, firmly under Ravalomanana's control, announced the former president's departure into exile and claimed that the crisis of the past six months was finally over. While this assertion was certainly premature, Ratsiraka's absence played havoc with morale among his supporters on the barricades, and many simply gave up the fight.⁷¹

On 4 May 2002 Ravalomanana was sworn in as president for the second time at a ceremony attended by foreign diplomats

Ravalomanana, sensing the chance to capitalise on Ratsiraka's apparent abandonment of the field, wrote on 15 June to President Wade in his capacity as co-ordinator of the OAU facilitation to thank the OAU for its assistance and indicate his agreement with the substance of the Dakar II resolution plan. In particular he agreed with the idea of early, internationally monitored legislative elections, and indicated that he intended to establish an inclusive government of national reconciliation. He also said that he would shortly submit to the OAU an amnesty proposal for Ratsiraka and his family, to allow them to live peacefully in Madagascar. To demonstrate that he was in earnest, the following day he dissolved his government, and asked Jacques Sylla to form a new administration.⁷² When the new cabinet ministers were named two days later, however, it became apparent that this was a unity government in name rather than substance. Few changes had been made, and though a handful of erstwhile Ratsiraka supporters were included these were from the margins of AREMA.⁷³

But by this stage Ratsiraka had committed a mistake so grave as to place him beyond the pale and relieve Ravalomanana of the necessity of offering amnesty. On 19 June reports began to surface about a small group of mercenaries intercepted in Tanzania en route from France to Ratsiraka's last stronghold in Madagascar, Taomasina. International condemnation followed quickly, though an OAU meeting convened in Addis Ababa to consider the situation failed to address the new developments, simply reiterating the need for a political solution to the crisis and falling in with Ratsiraka's demand for new presidential elections.⁷⁴ Ratsiraka, who can hardly have expected so generous a lifeline was now emboldened to return to Madagascar on 23 June 2002 claiming that the OAU decision vindicated his claim that until new elections were held he remained president.⁷⁵

This proved too much for President Wade, who had followed closely the unhappy saga as it developed. He argued that the situation had moved on, and that such an exercise was likely to prove a waste of time and effort. Accordingly, he indicated on 25 June that Senegal would recognise Ravalomanana as head of state in Madagascar, though formal recognition was delayed until 18 July.⁷⁶

On 26 June the United States gave its recognition and unfroze the country's assets in the Federal Reserve. In a further sign that isolation was ending, diplomats from a number of non-African countries also attended the country's independence celebrations.⁷⁷ On the military front, too, Ravalomanana's forces were going from strength to strength, taking a series of strategic towns in quick succession as Ratsiraka's militias dissolved into rapacious and vengeful groups of marauders.⁷⁸ Too late, Ratsiraka now appealed for a ceasefire as his resistance crumbled, and it became

evident to those observing events that his military gambit had failed.⁷⁹

The OAU, meanwhile seems to have determined not to allow its position to be affected by this reality, apparently still imagining that the island state would continue to be dangerously divided until new elections were held under international supervision.⁸⁰ On 2 July 2002 Ambassador Saïd Djinnit told journalists that, as recommended by the organisation's Central Organ on 22 June, Madagascar would be barred from attending the first African Union summit in Durban in terms of the OAU's principles on unconstitutional changes of government and the "principle of unity and the territorial integrity of Madagascar". "Neither of the two opposing governments in Madagascar qualifies to sit in the African Union", he was reported as saying, "The seat of Madagascar will remain vacant until a government is established in Madagascar in conformity with the principles of the OAU/AU."⁸¹

By now, Japan, Australia and the People's Republic of China had all joined those states already recognising Ravalomanana's administration, and as preparations were made for an official visit by the French foreign minister on 3 July 2002, the OAU/AU position was looking distinctly odd.⁸² De Villepin's visit not only signalled the end of France's procrastination over Madagascar, it brought with it a number of promises of financial support.⁸³

AFRICAN DISUNITY

Despite these developments Madagascar remained banned from the OAU summit in Durban. The African Union barred Madagascar from becoming member of the new organisation until a legitimate government was elected. Speaking at the opening of the OAU Council of Ministers on 4 July, South Africa's deputy president, Jacob Zuma, said that the decision was "A clear indication of a new way of doing things, and Africa's commitment to good governance". He also played up the mechanisms for peer review and conflict resolution, which he said showed Africa's commitment to democratisation and good governance.⁸⁴ It was small wonder that Ravalomanana's spokesman held the view that the organisation was "a club of old heads of state, some of them friends of Didier Ratsiraka, who keep themselves in power the same way he did".⁸⁵

On 5 July Ratsiraka flew into exile, landing in Seychelles, where he stayed for two days before proceeding to France.⁸⁶ On the 7th, Ravalomanana's forces entered Taomasina, without meeting resistance, signalling the end of military confrontation, apart from some small pockets of recalcitrants.⁸⁷ The following day, Germany followed the United States and France in recognising Ravalomanana.⁸⁸ Regardless of these developments, and despite appeals for sanity from President Wade, on 9 July, the first day of the AU's

existence, the organisation decided not to recognise the new government saying it had taken power unconstitutionally. Fresh elections would have to be held as a precondition for recognition. The decision followed a lengthy and extremely heated debate, with Senegal, the principal mediator, registering its dissent. Mauritius also took issue with the decision.⁸⁹ Indeed, the exchanges between Presidents Wade and Obasanjo bordered on the extraordinary, as the former accused his Nigerian counterpart of being miffed at being excluded from what was more efficient as a Francophone process. He added a broader insult for good measure: "Tell me who, among you all present in this hall, was elected through the same regular and democratic tactics that you are requiring from the Malagasy with this much obstinacy? How many of you did not rig the polls to indefinitely cling onto power at the great displeasure and despair of the African populations? How many of you did not come to power through violence and coups?" It was at this juncture that President Mbeki called a halt to the discussion to avoid "destructive discord".⁹⁰

The Fiji summit of African Caribbean and Pacific states (ACP) provided the backdrop for the last diplomatic confrontation between the presidential claimants. From Paris Ratsiraka sent his own representative, and so great was the disturbance among African representatives that Ravalomanana's government agreed to withdraw from the conference altogether, so Madagascar remained unrepresented.⁹¹ But this was to be the last diplomatic setback for Ravalomanana. Still in July 2002, Mauritius, Burkina Faso and Libya joined Senegal in breaking ranks with the rest of Africa over the question of recognition.⁹²

Better was to come for Ravalomanana, for on 26 July Prime Minister Jacques Sylla attended a special donors meeting convened by the World Bank in Paris to receive pledges of US\$2.3 billion over four years to assist in recovering from its recent travails.⁹³ Still the AU pressed on with its efforts to 'resolve' the Madagascar crisis, carefully turning a blind eye to a reality that others were quite happy to deal with, and apparently oblivious to the manner in which it was drawing attention to its own irrelevance. On 13 August 2002 an AU delegation led by South African foreign minister, Dr Zuma, actually arrived on the island, and left with a message to Ravalomanana that recognition would not be long in coming.⁹⁴

Not a week later Ravalomanana received a personal invitation from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to address the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which he did on 3 September.⁹⁵ The secretariat of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) also

indicated that despite the AU's stance, Madagascar would participate in all its technical meetings.⁹⁶

On 16 October 2002 the interior ministry announced that parliament, where AREMA held 66 of the 150 seats, would be dissolved ahead of new elections on 15 December. This action was directly related to the request of the international community that any doubts as to Ravalomanana's popular legitimacy be removed as soon as possible. In particular Ravalomanana was at pains to stress that this represented his commitment to the principles of Dakar II, a point he made in Pretoria on 29 October in consultations with an AU group consisting of Presidents Mbeki and Mwanawasa and Mozambican premier Pascal Mocumbi.⁹⁷

At this juncture, with Ravalomanana's TIM party forming a broad-based alliance with other longer-established political organisations, Ratsiraka's AREMA began to show signs of strain. The wave of enthusiasm for the new president was by now palpable, and opposition redoubts had proven so fragile that some elements within the old ruling party feared extinction if they should contest the election. Others argued that by breaking with Ratsiraka and the past, AREMA might begin to forge a new future for itself as a loyal and responsible opposition. Splits now emerged between those within AREMA calling for a total boycott of the polls and those arguing that they needed more time to prepare.⁹⁸

Reports surfaced about a small group of mercenaries intercepted in Tanzania en route from France to Ratsiraka's last stronghold

STRAINING AFTER A GNAT

By early December the AU was beginning to listen to the protests of Ravalomanana's opponents, and was asking whether the polls should not be postponed in the interests of 'freedom and fairness'. This piece of special pleading apart, which also drew adverse comment about the AU's partisan tendencies throughout the entire affair, the AU failed to send observers to observe Ravalomanana's crushing victory on 15 December 2002, in which he and his allies took 132 of the 160 seats.⁹⁹ Instead, the organisation dispatched an information mission from 8 to 20 December, which concluded that, by and large, the elections had been free and fair. In his report of 4 February 2003 the interim chairperson came to another convoluted conclusion, which is worth quoting in full.

This posed a dilemma for the African Union. Should the AU reconsider its position vis-à-vis the government of President Ravalomanana based on the outcome of the legislative elections, even though these elections were not held in strict conformity with the AU Summit decisions? Alternatively, should the AU maintain its position vis-à-vis the same

government, thus ignoring the outcome of the elections, which to some extent, went beyond electing members of National Assembly, but also signified support for Mr. Ravalomanana, and which were declared by the rest of the international community as free and fair?

During a meeting held in Sun City on 21 January 2003 to discuss conflict situations in Africa in general, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Troika and the Chairman of the Commission concurred that a delegation should be dispatched to Madagascar to engage the new government and the political class in general, including the opposition, on all aspects pertinent to the implementation of the Durban Summit Decision, including the conditions for national reconciliation and unity, the situation on human rights and the role of the opposition, and make recommendations on the basis of which the AU Chairman could undertake consultations and advise his peers accordingly.

The AU delegation comprising of representatives of the Troika and Commission visited Madagascar from 24 to 27 January 2003 and held meetings with a wide range of leaders and parties including the opposition. It was also received in audience by President Ravalomanana. At the time of finalizing this report, the AU delegation was still preparing its report.¹⁰⁰

On that same day, however, the Central Organ of the AU decided to recommend to the Assembly of the organisation that it recognise the government of Marc Ravalomanana, though it recommended, too, that a roundtable be convened of Madagascan parties to address issues relating to human rights, the rule of law and political detainees. Madagascar can expect to be admitted to the next summit of the AU in July 2003.¹⁰¹

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About this paper

Events in Madagascar after the disputed first round of the presidential election held on 16 December 2001 have taken many by surprise. This paper gives a detailed account of the order of events and explains their significance. The role played by the OAU/AU, as well as foreign governments such as Senegal and France, is discussed along with the significance of the meetings in Dakar in April and June 2002.

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