

ZIMBABWE—THE FIRST LADY MAKES WAVES

By George F. Ward

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Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of 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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Burkina Faso Lt. Col. Isaac Yacouba Zida pauses as he makes an announcement to the media in the city of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014. Burkina Faso's former president fled to neighboring Ivory Coast with his family after violent protests drove him from power after 27 years in office, Ivory Coast said Saturday, as Zida, a largely unknown military colonel, said he had taken the helm. (Source: AP Photo/Theo Renault.)

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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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Grace on the Hustings

As reported in the [September 5, 2014, edition of IDA's Africa Watch](#), Grace Mugabe assumed a larger political role, including a likely place in the ZANU-PF politburo, when she was selected in August 2014 by the party's women's league as its national secretary. Soon after her election, Grace Mugabe embarked on a round of "[Thank You Rallies](#)" and other events that took her to several provinces. Typically, Mrs. Mugabe sweeps into a provincial town with a retinue of government ministers, other officials, and party notables, gives a speech, and then departs for another destination. These events seem to have had three purposes.

Attacking the Vice President

During her provincial campaigns, Grace Mugabe has taken every opportunity to attack Zimbabwe's vice president, Joice Mujuru, who is widely seen as a possible successor to her husband. Mujuru, a military veteran of the liberation struggle, reportedly has the support of the majority of the ZANU-PF provincial party organizations. Mugabe's attacks against Mujuru—and Mujuru's allies—have been personal and vitriolic. She has accused Mujuru of "factionalism," a cardinal sin in the ZANU-PF, and demanded that the [vice president apologize](#) to President Mugabe. She has also accused Mujuru of fostering the creation of the Movement for Democratic Change (the main opposition party), of being corrupt, of maintaining contacts with representatives of the West, including the American ambassador, and even of [coup plotting](#). She has denigrated Mujuru's war record, and she publicly [refused to shake](#) the vice president's hand at an airport welcoming ceremony in Harare on October 21, 2014.

The Good Wife

Grace Mugabe's second purpose in her provincial outings has been to underline her husband's wisdom and authority and to stress her loyalty to him. In Grace Mugabe's apparent view, Robert Mugabe is not just state president. He is the state. She believes that her husband was [anointed](#) by God to lead Zimbabwe. Thus, when she [accuses Joice Mujuru of corruption](#), she does not urge legal action against her; instead, she demands that Mujuru approach President Mugabe, apologize, and ask for forgiveness. According to his wife, Robert Mugabe—and no one else—will chart the party's course for the future at the December congress.

Profiling Herself as Possible Successor

Third, there are indications that Grace Mugabe also sees herself as playing a more important role in the country's future—perhaps even as her husband's successor. In a speech at Mozowe, 40 kilometers north of the capital, on October 23, 2014, Mrs. Mugabe repeated her denunciations of Mujuru, calling on the latter to resign. She then went a step beyond

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her standard rhetoric and is [reported](#) to have said, “They say I want to be president. Why not? Am I not a Zimbabwean?” This statement was characterized by some local press as an announcement of her candidacy. That is one possible interpretation, although it could also be read as something less. Mrs. Mugabe has not generally been viewed as possessing significant political or leadership qualifications apart from her relationship with her husband. Whichever interpretation is correct, it seems certain that Grace Mugabe’s third purpose in her campaign was to raise her own political profile, whether as leader in her own right or as a kingmaker.

The Leader Steps In

Grace Mugabe’s words and actions have added to tensions within the party that would have been rising anyway during the run-up to the congress. A number of violent clashes between opposing party factions have been [reported](#). The two putative successors to Mugabe, Mujuru and Justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, appear to be attempting to solidify their own bases of support. In some cases, they have managed to oust each other’s supporters from party offices at the provincial and local levels.

With tensions rising, President Mugabe broke his silence with a [speech](#) to parliament that was delivered on October 28 and broadcast on national television the next day. Mugabe said, “Some war is going on in my party. People want positions. They even want to push senior people out.” He went on to add, “Some are saying ‘Mr. Mugabe is old so he should step down.’ Me, who brought the party to where it is now, who experienced colonial rule, jail and was in the bush beside the freedom fighters? Then along comes a mere child. No! When my time comes I will tell you.”

Who is this “mere child”? From the point of view of the 90-year old Mugabe, it could be his 49-year-old wife. More likely, it might be the 59-year-old Mujuru, who has been positioning herself as successor, perhaps too publicly, for years. Mugabe’s real point was to demand a stop to the intra-party strife. He did so with his usual masterful timing, and for the moment, public tensions have subsided. Days later, Mugabe announced that he would set up a [party commission](#) to look into the allegations that factionalism was threatening to divide the ZANU-PF in the run-up to the congress. This move is likely to have little practical effect, but may further inhibit public party in-fighting.

Why Did Grace Do It?

The question remains why Grace Mugabe undertook her high-profile campaign. Three explanations have been advanced, and there may be elements of truth in all three. First, Mrs. Mugabe intended to damage the prospects of Joice Mujuru. In that connection, some allege that Grace Mugabe has struck a deal with Emmerson Mnangagwa aimed at protecting her family’s interests after the demise of her husband. Second, Mrs. Mugabe might have acted to support her husband and preserve his space for maneuver at the upcoming party congress. Third, Mrs. Mugabe may well indulge herself in thoughts of a significant future political role, whether as president or as vice president under a successor chosen by her husband. Whatever her motivations, more action and fireworks are likely on tap for ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe in the coming weeks.

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Scott is the [first](#) white head of state of a sub-Saharan African country since 1994, when Nelson Mandela marked the end of [apartheid](#) by being elected South Africa's president, replacing F. W. de Klerk. Some argue that it is [inaccurate](#) to assign Scott the label of "first," noting that Paul Berenger, of French descent, stepped in as [premier](#) of Mauritius in 2000. Mauritius is [predominantly](#) Indo-Mauritian (68 percent) by ethnicity with a plurality of citizens observing the Hindu faith (48.5 percent)—hardly the profile of a typical, sub-Saharan African country.

Even though he ascended legally to the presidency according to constitutional [rules](#) for succession, Scott's tenure is unlikely to exceed the 90-day interim period before [elections](#) must take place. Because his parents were not Zambian, Scott is ineligible to run under the [current](#) and [revised](#) (still subject to approval) constitutions. In these circumstances, Scott was not expected to create the sort of drama that had surrounded Michael Sata, who earned the moniker "[King Cobra](#)" by being acerbic, outspoken, and controversial. Yet in his first week as interim president, Scott has demonstrated the contrary. He appears determined not to be an idle, lame duck.

On November 3, Scott unexpectedly relieved Edgar Lungu from the post of secretary general of the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) party. The move brought to the fore politicking and jockeying for the presidency that had previously been in the [background](#). The Youth Sports Minister, Chishimba Kambwili, allegedly joined with other cabinet members to [warn](#) Scott against the removal, citing the possibility of violence among Lungu's supporters. For his part, Lungu, after first [deferring](#) comment on the matter until after Sata's funeral, later took a stronger stance by charging that Scott acted [illegally](#). [Riots](#) pitting student protesters and other Lungu supporters against police in Lusaka raised the question of whether Kambwili's call was a warning or a threat. Amid [reports](#) of police allegedly intimidating Lungu at his home, a show of force and threatened turmoil by Lungu's supporters (some purportedly carrying [weapons](#)) apparently compelled Scott to acquiesce and [reinstate](#) him as secretary general.

Some have [alleged](#) that in dismissing Lungu, Scott was not acting on his own behest but instead on that of Fred M'membe, editor of the *Zambian Post*. As evidence that M'membe is orchestrating developments in Zambian politics from behind the scenes, detractors point to an [editorial](#) in M'membe's newspaper that underscored the legality of Scott's actions as acting president of the PF: "This [Article 54(1) of the PF's constitution] means that whatever the deceased president could do or undo, the vice-president, who has now taken over, can also do or undo. This means that all the powers that president Sata had as party president can now be fully exercised by Dr. Scott in a similar way."

Since Scott cannot run for president under the current or proposed constitutions and does not appear to have plans to challenge this constitutional constraint, what did he hope to gain by removing Lungu? [Speculation](#) abounds that the plan was to clear the way for Wynter Kabimba, who was the PF Secretary-General until last September. Although Sata officially sacked Kabimba with no explanation and little fanfare, [allegations](#) and purportedly substantiating evidence that have surfaced in the media point to Kabimba's involvement in a scandal. Questionable conduct aside, his ouster removed him from the cabinet



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but did not exile him from politics. [Entries](#) on Kabimba's official Facebook page paint the portrait of a man aspiring to be a presidential candidate who can identify with workers in the country's sizable [agricultural](#) sector (about 20 percent of GDP), but smaller than the industrial sector (about 40 percent of GDP). Despite its smaller size, the agricultural sector has experienced relatively consistent [growth](#) at the same time that fortunes of the industrial sector have varied according to fluctuations in commodity prices. Farming is one potentially strong linkage between Kabimba and Scott, who as [Agriculture Minister](#) during the 1990s received wide acclaim for rescuing Zambia from a food crisis induced by drought. A more direct connection between the two can be found a little over a year ago, as they stood opposed to PF party members they charged with being corrupt. Lungu, in his role as justice minister, asserted he would be happy to investigate the charges if the two could produce [evidence](#). They did not, and it is apparent that internal PF relations further fractured from there.

Scott faces a formidable task in his little more than 80 remaining days as Zambia's acting president. While acting within his power to support allies (he recently ordered military [protection](#) for Kabimba and M'membe), he must also be perceived as being fair if he is to stave off further conflict and peacefully guide Zambians through this presidential transition.

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Background

On October 30, 2014, Burkinabé protestors stormed Parliament in Ouagadougou in reaction against a constitutional amendment proposed by President Blaise Compaoré that would have allowed him to run for a fifth five-year term in elections scheduled for 2015. The vote was canceled, but continued unrest forced Compaoré to resign and flee the country. Despite a [constitutional provision](#) that designates the head of parliament as interim president in such a scenario, the army immediately seized control of the government and named Gen. Nabéré Honoré Traoré as the transitional leader. Traoré had been a [close ally](#) of Compaoré and was therefore also highly unpopular. Protests that resumed under the slogan “[soldiers have stolen our revolution](#)” this time demanded a “[democratic and civilian transition](#).” Capitalizing on this public frustration, Lt. Col. Isaac Zida, Commander of the elite Presidential Guard, announced himself as head of the transitional authority, revealing some [deep internal divisions](#) within the Burkinabé army.

International Interests in Burkina Faso

Under Compaoré, Burkina Faso was a [relatively stable](#) country in West Africa for decades. Compaoré had been a [key ally](#) of the United States and Burkina Faso a strategic partner in an otherwise turbulent region. Nestled between the operational zones of two major violent extremist organizations in the region— al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali to the north and Boko Haram in Nigeria to the east—Burkina Faso occupies an important location for American and French counterterrorism operations in the Sahel.

Since 2009, Burkina Faso has permitted the U.S. Air Force to base a number of [PC-12 turboprop](#) surveillance aircraft in the military section of the Ouagadougou international airport. These aircraft conduct surveillance missions throughout the Sahelian region, looking for AQIM and affiliated operatives. Burkina Faso is also an important contributor of personnel to United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions, with [2,000 Burkinabé](#) personnel currently serving in Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, South Sudan, and Sudan, and units are in training to deploy to the Central African Republic.

France also has a sizable special operations detachment stationed at a base close to Ouagadougou, from which it launches operations against violent extremist organizations in the region under Operation Barkhane. Compaoré himself had been a reliable, dependable partner in the region, considered by France to be its “[point man](#)” in West Africa. He played the role of an

effective statesman in [mediating numerous conflicts in the region](#), such as brokering a peaceful solution to political crises in the Ivory Coast, facilitating discussions between the Nigerien government and Tuareg rebel groups, and hosting talks between the Malian government and Tuareg rebels in 2013. Burkina Faso's intelligence services were [credited](#) with providing information that resulted in the release of European hostages in Mauritania in 2012.

Considering the Future

Despite this major political upheaval in Ouagadougou, there is no reason to believe that the U.S. military interests and assets in Burkina Faso are in danger or that the change of leadership will affect Burkina Faso's posture towards the U.S. military within its borders. But this turn of events ought to remind us that many of Africa's seemingly strong political institutions are in fact fragile. While some [experts](#) have been expecting Compaoré's eventual demise, citing opponents who have become increasingly assertive in recent years, most believed that he was firmly in control of the country.

Leaders in the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Chad and Burundi have either [changed](#) their countries' constitutions to abolish term limits in order to remain in office or have hinted that they may do so. Goodluck Jonathan will seek a second full term as Nigeria's president, in spite of a 2011 gentlemen's agreement to seek just one. We should not be surprised, therefore, if popular protests arise in these countries. If Burkina Faso can teach us anything, it is not to overestimate the durability of other longstanding rulers and "stable" regimes in Africa.

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