

**Martin Rupiya<sup>1</sup>**  
*South Africa*

**SADC'S INTERVENTION AND RELAPSE IN MADAGASCAR'S  
POLITICAL CRISIS 2009-2014 AND THE REVEALED ROLE OF  
FRANCE?**

**Abstract:**

*This article is a reinterpretation of the unconstitutional change of government in Madagascar between March 2009 and October 2014 plaguing the country into a political and security crisis. The chain of events had begun with the forced removal from power of the incumbent, President Marc Ravalomanana on 17 March 2009. Barely three days later, the leader of the civil society protest group, Andry Rajoelina, announcing that he had assumed power and the presidency. Almost immediately, the sub-regional body, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) during its Extraordinary Summit in Swaziland on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009, invoked Article 30 of the July 2002, African Union (AU)'s Constitutive Act, suspending Madagascar's membership and imposing sanctions until the constitutional order was restored. SADC's mandate to intervene in order to maintain peace and security in any of the fifteen Member-States was provided under Article 4 (h) and 4 (j) of the AU's Constitutive Act. Adopting the position taken by SADC, imposing sanctions on the political developments that involved the military unconstitutional change of government, the AU, the United Nations, the European Union (EU), the Organization of Francophonie States (OIF) and the United States also followed suit, effectively isolating the island state from continental and global, diplomatic, economic relations. However, what was not clear then was the role France had played behind the scenes in creating the crisis. Furthermore, it was not fully appreciated how Paris continued to influence and undermining the SADC intervention throughout the period of impasse. It was only at the end of the impasses, when Paris' proxy and protégé was installed back in power that this became apparent. The common thread running through the French intervention was to dissuade SADC from adopting military measures to restore constitutional order. In achieving this constant, France had invited the United States to become complicit in propping up its foreign policy interests towards*

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, PhD, University of South Africa (UNISA), College of Graduate Studies, Institute for African Renaissance Studies (IARS), e-mail: rupiy@unisa.ac.za

*perpetuating its “le village Francafriquie” policy in Madagascar, Mayotte and Reunion.*

**Keywords:**

*Madagascar, SADC intervention versus French “le village Francafriquie” policy*

## Introduction

In the area of diplomacy and international relations, it is rare for researchers to get insights into intelligence data and its subsequent transmission to metropolitan capitals for purposes of appropriate informed decisions bodies<sup>2</sup>. Amongst the many documents gathered by Julian Assange, the founder of the Wikileaks, included “a quarter million diplomatic cables” released in November 2010, can be found evidence of the works of diplomats in situations of political crises<sup>3</sup>. Significantly, some of the diplomatic cables will be available for historians and researchers after 25 years. However, given the early release of data through the action taken by Julian Assange, researchers are able to develop empirically grounded analysis from the available data. Our interest on the available documents was the seeming inability of SADC<sup>4</sup>, through its Organ on Politics, Defence and Security and the chief mediator, former President Joachim Chissano in the intervention in Madagascar’s political and military situation during 2009 until 2014. Then it appeared that SADC’s attempts to carry out its sub-regional security role faced with the crisis in

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<sup>2</sup> B. Dewar, S. Massey, B. Baker, *Madagascar: Time to Make a Fresh Start*, “Africa AFP”, 1/2013, pp. 13-15.

<sup>3</sup> J. Assange, *Release of Diplomatic Cables*, <[www.wikileaks.org/wiki/Julian\\_Assange](http://www.wikileaks.org/wiki/Julian_Assange)> (30.01.2018). Currently J. Assange is hiding inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he was granted asylum and citizenship since 7 December 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Treaty, established on 17 August 1992 in Windhoek, Namibia whose focus is to “Economic Integration and Development” also now includes, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Treaty was amended on 9 March 2001 to include the Organ on Politics, Defence & Security whose mandate is: “responsible for promoting peace and security; steer and provide Member States with direction regarding matters that threaten peace, security and stability in the region.” The Organ operates under the Summit Troika, organized around three Heads of State comprising the Outgoing, the Chair and the Incoming to ensure continuity as the Chairperson’s tenure rotates annually, in line to that of the Summit Chair. SADC is the successor to the Southern African Development Co-Ordination Conference (SADCC) of 1 April 1980 that had emerged from the 1977 Front Line States (FLS) comprising Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia, countries that had assisted in the national liberation of southern Africa. See: *About SADC*, <<http://www.sadc.int/about-sadc/sadc-institutions/org/>> (31.05. 2018).

Madagascar were being subtly undermined by the former colonial power, France. “However, in the light of the new evidence, we can begin to unravel the parallel existence of an active and aggressive continuation of France’s Francophonie policy that appeared to have successfully undermined SADC’s intervention initiative” (Madagascar’s Political Crisis Diplomatic Cables). Meanwhile, SADC emerging under the auspices of the former Front Line States (FLS) is known for its radical anti colonial states and desire to consolidate self-determination. This ideological stance clashes with France’ *le village* neo-colonial aspirations which had been challenged in the intervention the Democratic Republic of Congo during 1999 and later in Madagascar after 2009<sup>5</sup>.

On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009, Marc Ravalomanana the President of Madagascar was removed from office, ‘at gunpoint as I never resigned’ and ‘deliberately handed over power to the military,’ in his own words. Immediately after handing over power under duress Ravalomanana fled the country to South Africa whereupon he reported the forced seizure of power to SADC. Meanwhile, the HAT has to immediately decided, to hand over the power to the leader of the protest movement and Mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina, a television station owner popularly known as “TGV”. Rajoelina declared himself the new president on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009.

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009, a SADC Extraordinary Summit was held in Swaziland to deliberate on the political and security events in Madagascar that had resulted in the unconstitutional change of government, a development that is violates the AU protocol<sup>6</sup>. This was also true of SADC, with violations mediated through the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security which had the mandate to maintain peace and security in all Member-States invoking Article 30 and Article 4 (h) and (j). In July 2002 African Union (AU) Constitutive Act suspended Madagascar’s membership while imposing sanctions until constitutional order was restored<sup>7</sup>. Taking a cue from SADC and the AU, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the USA and Organization of Francophonie States (OIF) also followed suit, adopting the stringent trade and diplomatic isolation posture with Madagascar. As subsequent evidence was to reveal, this was precisely what France, in pursuing

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<sup>5</sup> D. Kadima, *The DRC & Lesotho Crises: Some Lessons for the SADC*, “Lesotho Social Science Review”, Vol. 5, No. 1/1999, pp. 65-82; M. P. Guy, *Continuity and Change in Franco-African relations*, “Journal of Modern African Studies”, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1995, pp. 1-20; M. P. Guy, *France’s African Policy in Transition: Disengagement & Re-Deployment*, Special Collection, University of Virginia, <<http://www.uca.edu.ar/uca/common/grupo21/files/02martin.pdf>> (20.12.2017).

<sup>6</sup> S. A. Dersso, *Unconstitutional Changes of Government and Unconstitutional Practices in Africa*, “Report on the Future of Peace Missions in Africa”, Paper No. 2, June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> J. Lunn, *Madagascar’s Political Crisis*, SN05962, International Affairs & Defence Section, House of Commons Library, London, 01.05.2012; B. Dewar, S. Massey, B. Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

its proxy relations with Rajoelina in the removal of Ravalomanana, did not wish to happen as revealed later by French Ambassador to Mozambique, Christian Daziano and Presidential Africa Advisor, Remi Marechaux<sup>8</sup>.

Meanwhile, the former Anglo and Lusophone colonial states making up the Front Line States that later morphed into SADC after June 1994, had resorted to armed struggle to secure independence in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and to a lesser extent in South Africa. After 1994, the maintenance of peace and stability remained a primary concern to the member states with active military deployments in support of the constitutional order. Examples include SADC's deployment in Mozambique during its civil war of the 1980s, which ended through the signing of the Rome Treaty of 1992. The deployment of SADC military forces in Lesotho under *Operation Boleas* in September 1998 when over six hundred South African National Defence Force (SANDF) troops crossed into Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, later joined by forces from Botswana. In 1999, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe under the SADC flag also deployed troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>9</sup>. It is against this background of SADC's preparedness to use the military option in Southern African that worried France and its determination to remain in its former colony Madagascar. This concern was revealed in the documents now available, capturing the discussions between Andrew R. Young and Ambassador Daziano. The French, African Presidential adviser, Remi Machuax at the Elysee Palace, had earlier expressed the same sentiment. On the question of a possible reinstatement of Ravalomanana, Paris was explicit, arguing "it was impossible" for this to happen although his supposed nemesis, Andry Rajoelina was himself "only nominal in power with no real support and popularity. On this point of 'impossibility, one is never certain whether or not France would be prepared to directly parry the SADC effort or work through proxies, including mercenaries to stop the deployment. France's increasing concerns was to prevent political deterioration as this could result in a second military coup. Furthermore, on this question, French parallel assessment of Rajoelina's popularity on the ground, both from the crowds and the military that "based entirely on demands for the ouster of Ravalomanana (now revealed) shallow backing and (perceived popularity) eroding quickly" Marechaux briefing to the US also intimated that: "based on four independent consular

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<sup>8</sup> Wikileaks, *French Ambassador (Christian Daziano) discusses Madagascar & Maputo I talks*, 2009-08-27, Ref. 09MAPUTO0960; Wikileaks, *Former FM Simao Discusses Madagascar Talks*, 2009-08-14, Ref. 09MAPUTO916.

<sup>9</sup> T. Neethling, *Military Intervention in Lesotho: Perspectives on Operation Boleas & Beyond*, "The Online Journal of Peace & Conflict Resolution", Issue 2.2, May 1999 <[www.trinstitute.org/ojpcr/](http://www.trinstitute.org/ojpcr/)> (30.01.2018); J. Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours. Apartheid Power in Southern Africa*, Bloomington 1986; S. Naidu, *Mozambique: Prospects for a Lasting Peace*, "Working Paper Series, Netherlands Institute for International Relations Clingendael", Hague 2001, pp. 5, 7-12; D. Kadima, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-70; J. Clark, *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, Basingstoke 2002.

reports: Rajoelina had received muted reception when he visited the country after the coup; French Ambassador Jean-Marc Chataigner had also described Rajoelina as “viewing himself as messianic” one called to save the country” – yet with no administrative experience, immature and with “authoritarian habits” – with no real leadership grip.” Meanwhile, “the economy had halved with donors suspending 50% of budget support and the IMF and WB cut their aid from November 2008 and indicated that after the March 2009 coup, no further funds would be released. France however, was unable to bail out HAT payroll and other expenses.’ Furthermore, there were now fears of a possible “quasi-Trotskyite” counter revolutionary, in support of the departed Ravalomanana<sup>10</sup>.

Given this candid assessment of their proxy, the French were also determined to remain in Madagascar, even when relations with Ravalomanana had broken down to include the closure of the French Embassy in Antananarivo. In the view of Remi Marechaux, comments that were also supported by a cited Ministry of Foreign Affairs position paper that was submitted to the mediation talks on Madagascar at the African Union in Addis Ababa on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009, “France had direct equity and investment in Madagascar; had the responsibility to respond to between twenty and twenty-five thousand French nationals spread out in the three locations of Madagascar, Mayotte and Reunion.

This is the context in which the decision taken by the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security was adopted on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009, partly unaware of the fact that in Madagascar, the sub-region would be faced with intrusive and underlying French post-colonial le village Francophonie policy which had been intricately woven into United States foreign policy.

However, in the next five years, SADC, was continually second guessed and deflected from finding a lasting solution to the conflict in French Madagascar. Precisely why this was not clear at that time, for an organization boasting huge experience such matters as demonstrated in Mozambique before the Rome Treaty of 1990; in the conflict in Zaire now *Democratic Republic of Congo* in September 1998 and in Lesotho during August 1991. In these scenarios, SADC had intervened and succeeded to restore law and order through military means and yet in Madagascar, this could not be achieved. Why?

The article argues that, determined and active French post-colonial policy known as the le village Francophonie functioned, aligned in a sophisticated manner, with the interests of the United States, to effectively block SADC’s intervention to restore the constitutional order in Madagascar between March 2009 and October 2014.

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<sup>10</sup> Wikileaks, *French Ambassador (Christian Daziano) discusses Madagascar & Maputo I talks*, 2009-08-27, Ref. 09MAPUTO0960; Wikileaks, *Former FM Simao Discusses Madagascar Talks*, 2009-08-14, Ref. 09MAPUTO916

In making the above argument, this discussion is divided in three sections, beginning with the background to the March 2009. In this, the research takes into account the troubled history of French and Ravalomanana rise to office against President Didier Ratsiraka in June 2002 to early January 2009 when he was facing similar street protests following the loss of his TIM party from representations in the capital Antananarivo. What is significant during this epoch however, was Ravalomanana's success in submitting an application and admission to the SADC Treaty area. In a single stroke, Ravalomanana had cancelled the famous four secret agreements that all former French colonies entered into according to Por Guy Martin which included: France retained monopoly on Foreign Policy; Economics; Defence; and the choice of alliance partners that a former colony would enter into agreement with. The second section begins in late 2008 until Ravalomanana's ousting in March 2009, isolating the role of France based on the Wikileaks diplomatic cables made available in November 2010. Finally, the discussion examines the aftermath of the mediation attempts, leading to the September 2011 Road Map by SADC that specifically signals the abandonment of the military option in resolving the crisis in Madagascar, revealing the triumph of French overseas policy before, again one of their perceived proxy's was returned to power through the ballot box, effectively ensuring the status quo.

In entering the political fray in Madagascar, by default, SADC joined that faction of political and military actors who had decided to eject French, political and socio economic dominance, led by Marc Ravalomanana<sup>11</sup>. In this attempt, SADC would find itself against deeply embedded French interests, manifest in the defence outpost infrastructure of the air base and natural harbour as well as the significant resident community<sup>12</sup>. Stated simply, SADC was confronting the continued re-deployment of French Africa policy also known as *le village de la Francophonie* as aptly argued by Martin Por Guy<sup>13</sup>. As if this was not enough, France took the deliberate decision to calibrate and align its policy to that of the United States getting the global power on its side. Evidence of this emerges in the constant and repetitive references to "our policy is similar to yours" and "We Share the Same Objectives" hammered into the ears of US operatives by the African Adviser to the French Presidency, Remi Maremaux and his staff<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> P. D. Schmitt, *From Colonies to Client-States: The Origins of France's Postcolonial Relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa, 1940-1969*, doctoral thesis 2011, unpublished, University of Maryland, USA.

<sup>12</sup> Wikileaks: *French Worried by Madagascar*, 2009-04-29, Ref. 09PARIS598; M. P. Guy, *France's African Policy in Transition...*; L. Ploch, *Madagascar's 2009 Political Crisis*, US Congress Research Service, 2009-10-07, Ref. R40448, <www.crs.gov> (30.01.2018).

<sup>13</sup> M. P. Guy, *Continuity and Change...*; Idem, *France's African Policy in Transition...*

<sup>14</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar: French Support Political Consensus Leading to Elections*, 2009-06-23, Ref. 09PARS848; Wikileaks, *Madagascar: The US & France "Share the Same Objectives"*, 2010-01-22, Ref. 10PARS66.

It is significant to note the historical, “cyclical pattern from crisis to crisis but each phase getting shorter in between”<sup>15</sup>.

### **Background to Conflict, Crisis and SADC intervention: French policy, participation and partnerships?**

Madagascar’s political history since independence on 26 June 1960 has been characterized by organized marches and protests around the capital Antananarivo that then draw in repression from the incumbent government and military units’ participation, leading to calls for military coups as part of the political succession. This has since established a discernable trend. For example, after the first President, Phillbet Tsiranana, by May 1972, his government was subjected to unrest and he was forced to dissolve his administration and hand over power to a High Authority of the State (HAT)<sup>16</sup>. Viewed subsequently, this is the period that established the phenomenon of handing over power to HAT in Madagascar when the country is in crisis. For Tsiranana, by May 1972 citizens unhappy with his rule and massed on the streets and in the capital forcing him to hand over power to Army Chief, General Gabriel Ramantsoa. The next phase was shorter as, in June 1975, Ramantsoa was, again from seemingly popular street protests, forced to hand over power to Vice Admiral Didier Ratsiraka in June 1975<sup>17</sup>. In August 1991 as the winds of multiparty democracy were spreading, mass protests visited Madagascar, resulting in Ratsiraka handing over to the HAT led by Albert Zafy who later became Head of State.

However, in 1996, the same tendency reared its head, with mass demonstrations calling for a military coup to replace Zafy who faced impeachment. The following year in 1997, Ratsiraka returned to power and yet his end set the tone for our discussion as he was tussling with the Mayor of Antananarivo at the time, Marc Ravalomanana. In December 2001, Ratsiraka faced the youthful businessman in the presidential elections, Ravalomanana. The result was disputed and resulted in marches around the countryside and capital. The protests continued to escalate, drawing even more people to its ranks and the military by January 2002. As the stalemate continued, it was only when the military abandoned Ratsiraka for Ravalomanana that the impasse was broken<sup>18</sup>.

Marc Ravalomanana as mayor of Antananarivo and with an acknowledged business empire in Madagascar appears to have been the only leader who had assumed office without direct French support. In the disputed elections of

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<sup>15</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *A Cosmetic End to Madagascar Crisis*, Africa Report No. 281/2014, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> J. Lunn, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> L. Ploch, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *A Cosmetic End...*, p. 2; L. Ploch, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

December 2001, Ravalomanana claimed to have defeated the incumbent, Ratsiraka who refused to step down. He approached the courts seeking relief whilst in parallel, because of his popularity, based on his *Tiako I Madagasikara (TIM) "I Love Madagascar"* political party, and was able to bring people on the streets in protest on the perceived rigged election. Sensing victory, in February 2002, Ravalomanana declared himself president of unleashing a civil war in the country. Eventually, the deteriorating clashes were resolved in June 2002 when, "the military abandoned Ratsiraka and coalesced behind Ravalomanana." Shorn of the important military support, in July 2002, Didier Ratsiraka fled in exile in Paris<sup>19</sup>. Clearly the role of the military in politics in Madagascar played a determinant role as the decisive swing constituency.

Afterwards, the Elysee Palace refused to recognize Ravalomanana's administration drawing the ire of the new incumbent and setting the tone for strained relations. Meanwhile, the United States proceeded to officially recognize Ravalomanana's government in a development that acted as a catalyst for Germany, China, the United Kingdom and five other African governments, which followed suit. France reluctantly joined in the official recognition.

However, for Ravalomanana, almost as a development to consolidate the self-determination position of Madagascar, embarked upon the radical and fundamental reorientation of the country's foreign policy, economic relations, language and cultural relations with France. To this end, his application to join SADC, approved in 2005 became one of the most radical ruptures of French-Madagascar foreign, defence and security relations since independence. Acceptance in the former liberation movement and largely Anglophone organization placed Madagascar squarely under the ambit of the African Union's African Peace & Security Architecture (APSA) whose sub-regional arms include SADC but has a direct anti-colonial and solidarity agenda. Stated differently, in one stroke, Ravalomanana had cancelled the import of the most important four agreements that were reached with weak African leaders by Paris after 1960. As Martin Por Guy and Paul Daniel Schmitt point out, the nominally independent African remained subject in their foreign policy in which they would only engage any external powers via Paris; had handed over all matters of defence and security to the metropolis; economic policy and agree not to into any alliances except with France<sup>20</sup>. It is also significant to note that when eventually Ravalomanana was forced to flee at gunpoint, he was not only able to trigger the AU's "unconstitutional removal of an elected government"

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<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *A Cosmetic End...*, p. 2; L. Ploch, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> M. P. Guy, *France's African Policy in Transition...*; P. D. Schmitt, *op. cit.*; N. Frank, *Ivory Coast's Founder: Lavish Funeral*, "The New York Times", 07.02.1994; D. Caglar, *From Francafricque to Eurafrique with Sarkozy – Not Much Difference?*, "The Turkish Weekly Journal", 11.03.2008, <[www.turkishweekly.net/op-ed/2343](http://www.turkishweekly.net/op-ed/2343)> (30.01.2018).



restraints on Madagascar but also was the first leader to seek refuge in southern Africa and not Paris. As a consequence, even where SADC appeared weak in its intervention, it was able to frustrate Paris by preventing the selective recognition of Rajoelina's administration.

On the economic front, when Ravalomanana embarked on his radical transformation, it is argued that he confronted the monopoly cartels that had been established since independence. Now, these were made up of over 140 major corporations and in excess of 5 000 small to medium sized businesses owned and operated by French citizens. Amongst these two large and small to medium sized business, the economic market in Madagascar left no room for domestic players. Furthermore, the same businesses also operated in the two islands of Mayotte and Re-Union. On the question of language and culture, Ravalomanana decreed that the schools programme include English, reducing the centrality of French.

In December 2006, Ravalomanana swept the polls securing a 55% vote, based on an increasing popularity and political organization throughout the island state. Armed with this popular mandate, it simply served to allow him to accelerate the implementation of his policies to a point where he became authoritative. In July 2008, Ravalomanana closed down the French Embassy and expelled its Ambassador, Gildas Lidec. The Embassy was to remain closed for the next eight months.

Meanwhile, analysts have argued that, even as Ravalomanana revelled in his new found popularity leading the Tiako y Madag (I love Madagascar) party, he failed to build sufficient connection and alliances with the French business community and the crust of Madagascar elite that included senior military officers. His policies therefore only succeeded to provoke and alienate both France and a significant portion of the leading military "junta joining forces with the amateurish Andry Rajoelina to force him out by March 2009.

However, while the period reviewed of December 2001 until late 2008 laid the basis of antagonism between Paris and Antananarivo we need to understand from the new evidence how an alternative relationship emerged between the metropolis and Andry Rajoelina. The latter appeared to play a cameo role as derided by the French Presidential Africa Advisor<sup>21</sup>. But before we examine this we need to better understand the question as to how important was/is Madagascar to France?

### **Strategic, Cultural and Economic Importance of Madagascar to France?**

When the winds of change heralding decolonization in Africa occurred during the early 1960s, "France was not ready"<sup>22</sup>. Instead, while Paris publicly

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<sup>21</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar: The US & France* "Share the Same Objectives, 2010-01-22, Ref. 10PARS66.

<sup>22</sup> D. Caglar, *op. cit.*; M. P. Guy, *France's African Policy in Transition...*; P. D. Schmitt, *op. cit.*

provided “wholesale independence” to all her former colonies, different arrangements were secured behind the scenes. Part of this was to identify key satellite countries that would execute some of its interests. By 1960, France had established a sub-regional security zone on the island of Madagascar that managed the other two neighbouring protectorates of Mayotte and Re-Union. On the island of Madagascar, France had established defence infrastructure comprising the Ivato military airfield near the capital Antananarivo, a deep sea natural harbour of Antsiranana on the northern end of the island as well as installing satellite radar and communications equipment for military, naval and air surveillance of the southern hemisphere and going north up to the Equator. France also divided into separate categories those countries of vital importance and the rest in which she would not invest dedicated effort and resources.

In this, Madagascar was graded in the higher category that included: Berlin, Madrid, Rabat, Rome London, Washington, and Dakar-Senegal. Given this high categorization, France was simply never going to ‘walk away’ from its interests that were tied in with its influence and infrastructure in Madagascar. Furthermore, France had more than 20 000 citizens resident in the three islands with the majority in Madagascar conducting commercial and other business organized in more than 5 000 small to medium sized companies.

In terms of finding alternative levelling off alliance partners to equalize the unequal power relations, Ravalomanana, by placing Madagascar under SADC had made an unprecedented achievement in which the latter had sufficient political will and capacity to confront the metropolis.

From 2007, the politically and economically affected French expatriates whose work permits and visas were becoming increasingly difficult to renew joined by local white commercial business reacted aggressively, demanding change. Soon this sentiment openly began a spirited campaign calling for leadership renewal by “anyone-but-Ravalomanana.” In the same year, Ravalomanana’s TIM party lost political control of the capital, abbreviated as Tana, to a local disc jockey, Andry Nirina Rajoelina who owned a television station. This private communication medium began to muster opposition against the government around the new and brash leader<sup>23</sup>. From this point, the French appeared to have discovered a local proxy through which they would now confront Ravalomanana amidst allegation of handing large tracts of land to the South Korean Company, “Daewoo”; the purchase of a presidential jet for USD\$60 million and other issues of alleged corruption<sup>24</sup>.

In the midst of the turmoil, in late December 2008, Andry Rajoelina television station conducted an interview with the exiled Ratsiraka. The Ravalomanana administration took serious umbrage and promptly closed the

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<sup>23</sup> L. Ploch, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar: GoM (again) Denies Daewoo Land Deal*, 2008-12-19, Ref. ANTA787; Wikileaks, *Madagascar Abandoning Ravalomanana*, 2009-02-09, Ref. ANTAN90.

station. This had the opposite effect, triggering even bigger demonstrations against government.

To conclude on the historical turbulent political and military history of succession in Madagascar, in January 2009 street protests visited the country, with crowds calling for Ravalomanana to step down and troops opened fire killing several score. Some units based around the capital, at Camp Capsat protested at the repressive use of force resulting in mutinies. These elements were to become part of the mutinous forces by March. Subsequently, the Army Chief gave the squabbling politicians 72 hours to find a solution. However, before this was over, the Army Chief was deposed and early during 16-17 March, Ravalomanana was forced to relinquish office, handed over power to the Military Council who sat on the HAT before fleeing the island state. With more than eight military coups occurring since 1972, Madagascar political environment “reflected a cyclical pattern from crisis to crisis – but significantly, with each period getting shorter”<sup>25</sup>.

In each of the scenarios of power changes, evidence of external and French involvement has always been mooted but never proven or documented from primary evidence. Overall, underlying the weak governing structures in former Madagascar is what Paul Daniel Schmitt’s thesis has attempted to document related to the specific dynamics of decolonization in the former French colonies which took a distinctly different form, reflecting a “... result (that) was increasingly cynical support of despotic regimes friendly to French interests, in an effort to maintain political influence in Africa after decolonization”<sup>26</sup>.

However, based on the freshly available sources, here is what was/is the French view as enunciated by Remi Machuax, Africa Presidential Advisor who had earlier worked as a Madagascar and southern Africa, desk officer before being promoted in 2007. The same had also been an Exchange Diplomat in Washington with the Department of State and now operating from the Elysee Palace in Paris.

### **The March 2009 Putsch in Antananarivo, SADC intervention and competing French interests?**

The events leading to the putsch that followed traditional Madagascan way of carrying out a coup accelerated towards the end of 2008. Based on the Wikileaks cables evidence on the diplomatic discussions, several developments that occurred can now be better understood. This section will review the interlocking local, regional and international dynamics around the crisis in Madagascar manifest in power struggle between Ravalomanana versus Rajoelina and each with their alliance partners. The latter is revealed in the diplomatic cables reflecting on the roles of the military, France and that of the

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<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *A Cosmetic End...*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> P. D. Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

United States and finally, the SADC response. Of primary concern was the struggle between France's le village foreign policy versus SADC's emancipation and self-determination quest for citizens of Madagascar.

### **France, the 'military junta' and Rajoelina axis leading to the removal of Ravalomanana from power.**

December has also witnessed further escalation of the rivalry between Ravalomanana and Rajoelina when the latter's TV Station broadcast an interview with exiled former President Didier Ratsiraka. Ravalomanana's administration promptly closed the station down. Furthermore, the government then sought to arrest Rajoelina who quickly went into the French Embassy for protection. Even from the safety of the derided French Embassy in the eyes of Ravalomanana's administration, Rajoelina continued to organize and publicly call for more demonstrations, announcing planned workers shut down on 24-25 January 2009.

By late January and early February 2009, the political and security crisis in Madagascar reached "a point of no return" amidst developments that France's role and influence was becoming more explicit<sup>27</sup>. This assessment was further confirmed by the tragic events of 7 February 2009 when "at exactly 1444 hours GMT, elements from the Presidential Guard opened indiscriminate fire on a crowd of about 10 to 20 000 protestors on a road adjacent to the US Embassy, killing 50 and 172 seriously wounded. The fatalities figure was to eventually rise to an estimated 135 dead"<sup>28</sup>. The opposition to advantage of this carnage in order to whip up anti-government sentiment when, "on the Monday, at 10 00 am, they organized a public body viewing spectacle. This effectively turned the tide against Ravalomanana's government.

However, already a difference in strategy had emerged with the French trying very hard to dissuade Rajoelina from going ahead with the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 March as the French were now convinced that a 'Third Force' acting on behalf of Ravalomanana was orchestrating the events to a level that would not be manageable<sup>29</sup>.

In parallel with the deteriorating situation, France's presence in Madagascar increased, in spite of the Embassy that had been shut in July 2008 and the Ambassador expelled by Ravalomanana. A delegation led by senior

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<sup>27</sup> Wikileaks, *Diplomatic Effort Reveals Full Blown Malagasy Political Crisis*, 2009-01-23, Ref. ANTAN60.

<sup>28</sup> Wikileaks, *President May Be Open to Meeting – But Not to Real Dialogue*, 2009-01-30, Ref. ANATAN68 & 69; Wikileaks, *Engaging With the New "government"*, 2009-03-18, Ref. ANTAN187 (citing Ordinance 2009, 001 of 17 March conferring full powers to the Military Directorate); L. Ploch, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Wikileaks, *President May Be Open to Meeting – But Not to Real Dialogue*, 2009-01-30, Ref. ANATAN68 & 69.

representatives of the *Francophonie* arrived in Antananarivo closely followed by the new French Ambassador, Jean-Marie Chataigner. Both were able to meet Rajoelina who was still leading the protests. The parallel campaign by French business community of “anyone-but-Ravalomanana” was also in full swing behind Rajoelina.

Meanwhile, parallel meetings amongst the diplomatic corps, comparing notes on the deteriorating security situation continued with increasing frequency. During one of the diplomatic meetings, the US Ambassador reported that they had begun to undertake emergency evacuation measures during which “a town hall type meeting had been held with all US citizens including Peace Corps volunteers, diplomats and families engaged in non-critical areas in order to gauge sentiment and allow those wishing to leave early to do so”<sup>30</sup>.

In contrast to the intended US action, the French Ambassador informed the meeting that “it was not feasible for France to evacuate as its nationals constituted a large percentage of the expatriate community. Instead, all French nationals had simply been warned to remain in the ‘bunkers’ and out of sight”<sup>31</sup>.

### **The US Embassy/Ambassador and the Senior Military Officers’ parallel, political discussions**

In January 2009, crowds were calling for Ravalomanana to step down and troops opened fire on demonstrators killing several demonstrators on the streets that bordered the United States Embassy. As a result of the deaths of civilians, units based around the capital, Antananarivo protested at the repressive measures. This culminated in some of the units forced to mutiny and refused to take orders. Faced with the disintegration of key institutions including the armed forces, on 10 March 2009, the Army Chief, General Edmond Rasolomahavdry gave the squabbling politicians 72 hours to find a solution to the political disputes. The next day on the 11<sup>th</sup> March, ‘opposition soldiers’ from Capsat Army Corps, Personnel Administrative & Technical Services stormed Army Headquarters and forced General Edmond to resign, laying the foundations of an imminent civil war.

A significant development behind the scenes was the now exposed role of the military in the forced political succession of Marc Ravalomanana from power in March 2009. The lead up to the event and the personalities emerge from the discussions held with the US Ambassador and his officials by the generals particularly from the first week and accelerating during the actual change over period of 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

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<sup>30</sup> Wikileaks, *Diplomatic Effort Reveals Full Blown Malagasy Political Crisis*, 2009-01-23, Ref. ANTAN60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*; Wikileaks, *President May Be Open to Meeting – But Not to Real Dialogue*, 2009-01-30, Ref. ANATAN68 & 69.

As the dispatches noted: “Paris gravely concerned with Madagascar on the brink of upheaval as the violence targeted Police and Civilian authorities – some of whom appeared desperate to provoke further repression”<sup>32</sup>. Citation of the above is important, locating the different but coalescing military and civilian led protests in which the French appeared to be involved.

Exactly a month earlier, on 8 February 2009, Naval Chief, Abdel Radavison had visited the US Ambassador claiming “he was there on behalf of the Defence Chief” to advise that preparations for military intervention in the political crisis “were at an advanced stage.”

Following the recent massacres, Radavison again engaged the Ambassador, anxious to stress that, “whatever intervention undertaken in future would be in line with the constitution. But, the forces had lost all respect for Ravalomanana given his idiosyncrasies and strange decisions”<sup>33</sup>. Some of the reasons advanced for abandoning Ravalomanana ‘was his decision to purchase the presidential jet and the perception that he had already invited and deployed foreign forces from South Africa who were responsible for the mass shootings on Malagasy citizens.” For senior generals, holding this view that was not supported by facts did not appear contradictory but simply served to reinforce their already adopted positions<sup>34</sup>.

After the departure of the military, another Ravalomanana confidant, identified as one of the three secret negotiators arrived. This was the Environment Minister, Harrison Randramanana who appeared to be in “a state of deep despair advising that “...he had been hiding in a friend’s house, and ready to collapse as he was bedridden with hypertension and under doctor’s orders (to rest). He then foretold of coming resignations and openly debated whether he too should follow suit? He said he was reluctant to resign, only because he did not want to give momentum to the Mayor’s initiative”<sup>35</sup>.

From Harrison’s intransigent message, from 8 March 2009, “elements from the Army joined the public protests on the streets.

The significance of this is that foreign diplomats were privy to the highest political infighting amongst the elite, depicting a weak and disorganized government. Furthermore, this line of inquiry also reveals that behind the street protests were active considerations being taken by key institutions of the establishment.

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<sup>32</sup> Wikileaks, *French Envoy's Negative View of Mozambique*, 2009-09-04, Ref. 09MAPUTO986.

<sup>33</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar Abandoning Ravalomanana*, 2009-02-09, Ref. ANTAN90.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*; L. Ploch, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar Abandoning Ravalomanana*, 2009-02-09, Ref. ANTAN90.

## **The Change of Guard – the role of the Military 16-18 March 2009.**

The military faction that had moved away from supporting Ravalomanana, in true Madagascar fashion as we have argued, on 17<sup>th</sup> March “visited Ravalomanana’s office and – at gunpoint – asked him to resign and transfer power to Rajoelina”<sup>36</sup>. Soon afterwards, Ambassadors representing the US, South Africa and the UN Mediator, Drame also arrived at Ravalomanana’s offices where he showed them the Ordinance transferring power to the Military Directorate.

Later, Ravalomanana called the US Ambassador “breathless from a hiding place – believed to be somewhere in Antsirabe – now claiming “I was forced to sign this by the military who came to my office and threatened me, 15 minutes before you came in. (Handing over to) The Military Directorate idea was a way not to do what they wanted” he said, “then I barely got out before they came back after you left”<sup>37</sup>.

However, on the above point, the Military Directorate almost immediately passed on power to Rajoelina as leader of HAT who was then requested to seek a High Court decision in order to confirm the constitutionality of his ascension to presidential office. This decision was made in his favour confirming the intention of French influence to remove Ravalomanana and install his nemesis.

After Ravalomanana had fled to SADC, important governmental appointment and policy changes were made by Rajoelina to reflect the restoration of French influence in the affairs of Madagascar. Part of the early actions taken were also intended to destroy Ravalomanana’s TIKO political party, accused of owing the state a huge tax debt. Furthermore, the newly appointed Finance Minister demanded USD\$ 600 000 debt, owed by Ravalomanana. There were also fresh allegations of “failure to account for the purchase of the presidential jet, “Force One II.” Next, a decision by the new Education Minister, Julien Razafimanazato, who was living in Paris was instructive: “instructing that the first language of instruction was going to be French.” This reversed efforts by Ravalomanana who had introduced English and other languages into the curriculum for the first time.

However, the distinct role of the military could not be handled by Rajoelina as, “his appointment of the Minister of Defence, General Raonenantsoamampianina was quickly vetoed by the military as “deemed unacceptable.” This remonstrance was taken without resistance<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar/Ravalomanana: I Did Not Resign!*, 2009-03-20, Ref. ANTAN195.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> Wikileaks, *Madagascar Transitional Cabinet Partially Formed*, 200-04-18, Ref. ANTAN283.

## **SADC Mediation frustration – Road Map Sept 2011 and relapse October 2014**

The feared SADC tendency to deploy the military, restore the political order as well as law and order following its 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009 meeting in Swaziland did not materialize. The difficulty of mounting a military operation was revealed in telling comments between the US Deputy Chief of Mission, Michael Koplovsky and Zambia's Foreign Affairs, Africa Division senior official, Awa Lubundi during a formal meeting organized in Lusaka on 23 June 2009. With the discussion captured in the diplomatic cables, constituting "verbatim notes by Koplovsky," SADC sought to leverage international cooperation towards resolving the crisis in Madagascar rather than go it alone. This was to shape SADC's approach to the crisis which later guided the thrust of the appointed Mediator, former Mozambiquean President, Joachim Chissano in the Maputo I and II subsequent meetings that began in August of the same year. But simply citing the diplomatic discussions is illustrative of the thinking and alternative considerations that guided SADC's actions: For example "...Lubundi inquired how the USG might respond to possible SADC military intervention in Madagascar?" Koplovsky asserts that, "our response was to reiterate that the US advocates for peaceful resolution to this crisis". Lubundi conceded that sending a SADC brigade was something that they leaders had considered during their 20<sup>th</sup> June Summit in Johannesburg they later found this "unrealistic an option"

Curiously also, SADC had refrained from pushing for the reinstatement of Marc Ravalomanana and instead suggested an interim arrangement, partly recognizing the historical role that HAT plays in that country's troubled political transitions<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, this position of 'realism' by SADC stemmed from previous failed intercession attempts in Lesotho during 1998 and the perception that the Brigade may well be resisted by ordinary Malagasy people and therefore likely to result in bloody clashes and failure. It is also important to note that this lack of effectiveness of SADC's military capacity towards resolving political crises is something that is not generally publicized and only available in the unblemished diplomatic talks expected not to be in the public domain. This posture is contrasted by the comments French Ambassador Daziano then makes in Maputo on the sidelines of the August 2009 meeting when he asserts: "it would be impossible to reinstate Ravalomanana"<sup>40</sup>.

Instead, the next significant event was the scheduled Meetings in Maputo beginning in August 2009 chaired by former President Joachim Chissano. In

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<sup>39</sup> Wikileaks, *Zambia Does Not Rule Out Military Intervention in Madagascar*, 2009-06-24, LUSAKA450.

<sup>40</sup> Wikileaks, *French Envoy's Negative View of Mozambique*, 2009-09-04, Ref. 09MAPUTO986; Wikileaks, *Former FM Simao Discusses Madagascar Talks*, 2009-08-14, Ref. 09MAPUTO916.



this gathering, for reasons best known to the French, all past presidents in exile in Paris turned up in Maputo with “Didier Ratsiraka, complete with family and a large delegation attended, courtesy, special plane provided by France. Former President Zafy was also in attendance<sup>41</sup>. A second session, Maputo II was held on 17 August 2012 at which military generals from Madagascar attended. This was in preparation for the Road Map agreement reached in September 2011 which created consensus and time lines for holding elections as the preferred outcome from the crisis. However, because Rajoelina had been in power for several years, although the Road Map had provided for both the two leading protagonists not to stand, the two were able to put forward proxies. Effectively, French le village Francophonie had survived and SADC, through attrition had been muscled out of being a central player in the resolution of the crisis in Madagascar by October 2014.

### Conclusions

The political and security crisis that occurred in Madagascar during March 2009 until the election of former President Andry Rajoelina who was aimed at restoring French interests. These would be managed by proxy, through pliant officials elected after the October 2013 elections and presidential run of of December. In the election, former Rajoelina’s Finance Minister was the candidate, succeeding to garner 53.5% against Ravalomanana’s ally, Jean Louis Robinson who had 46.5%. From October 2014, it was clear this administration was happy to accelerate the implementation of pro-France policies as we had noted in early April 2009. Soon after winning the presidential electoral run-off, the new regime announced military promotions, perceived to have been its way to offer rewards to the supporting officers. In this way, the temporary rupture of French policy in Madagascar that had been brought about by Ravalomanana had been quashed. In Madagascar, the events in the background of the March 2009 military coup only came to the surface, thanks to the Julian Assange, Wikileaks which released diplomatic cables in November 2010. Using this fresh evidence, this article has attempted to provide another interpretation of the events based on these previously unavailable materials. What had been in the public domain or gathered through word of mouth was that, President Marc Ravalomanana’s administration, in power since February 2002 had fallen out with the French when he tried to re-direct the economy, language and culture from the traditional stranglehold of the colonial power. The Elysee Palace in Paris, acting in concert with French business interests in Madagascar had launched a campaign to remove the president called, “anyone but Ravalomanana.” This was soon spearheaded by the young and brash local mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina, owner of a Television station popularly known as “TGV” referring to the fast French rail.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Lunn, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Circumstantial opinion ranged from: distance, of the island state and therefore a crisis out of sight, escaping, physically affecting the southern African region; the predominant use of the French language by a largely Anglophone sub-regional community; lack of political will by SADC, frustrated by the intransigence of the main parties in dispute in Madagascar or even, the perceived competition between the confusing lead mediation countries of Mozambique and South Africa. But, the real reasons why SADC's intervention simply relapsed, even against its illustrious history as the Front Line States (FLS) with the determination and sacrificial capacity to assist sister countries to gain independence in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa remained unclear.

However, it was only after the trove of documentary evidence contained in the Wikileaks released by Julian Assange that were able to have insights of what actually happened to successfully thwart SADC's intervention into the political and military crisis that engulfed the island state of Madagascar from March 2009 when the then President Ravalomanana fled into exile to South Africa until his return in October 2014. When he returned, his nemesis, Andry Rajoelina appeared to have established himself with proxy players in order to maintain the status quo.

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