



ZIMBABWE AT THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA?

This paper explores the dynamics in Zimbabwe since the military in Zimbabwe forced President Mugabe to resign and replaced him with one of them: Emmerson Mnangagwa. It remains to be seen if the new president is able to enforce the necessary reforms against vested interests.

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What happens these days in Zimbabwe often took place in history: the much younger wife of an old dictator confuses the power she received through him with real power and overplays her cards.

Grace Mugabe, the much younger wife of 93 years old Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe convinced her husband to dismiss his Vice-President and long-time comrade from the days of the liberation struggle, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is well connected with the military and security establishment. Mrs. Mugabe's intention is to succeed her husband with the help of the so called Generation 40 (G 40) faction. Already in 2015 she engineered the dismissal of another Vice President and rival, Joice Mujuru. Mnangagwa's dismissal was too much for the military. They put President Mugabe under house arrest. Mrs. Mugabe is thought to have fled to Namibia.

The military avoided to term their actions a coup because this could have let to the intervention of both SADC (Southern African Development Community) and the AU (African Union). The SADC security troika met in Gaborone and reiterated SADC's policy against "unconstitutional removal of democratically elected governments". Significantly, they did not demand that the Zimbabwean military immediately return power to Mugabe. According to unconfirmed reports the military arrested a number of ministers belonging to the G 40 group under the accusation of corruption. According to the military's reading they did not stage a coup but merely removed "criminals" surrounding Mugabe.

A timeline of Mugabe's reign

- *1963 Mugabe and others form the ZANU party to fight white minority rule in the British colony of Rhodesia*
- *1980 Independence, Mugabe wins the first elections and becomes Prime Minister of the newly named Zimbabwe*
- *1982 Mugabe sacks fellow independence fighter Joshua Nkomo from the ZAPU party, followed by massacres at the Ndebele*
- *1987 Mugabe assumes a more powerful role as president*
- *2000 first electoral defeat when voters reject constitutional changes that would have given him more powers*
- *2008 power sharing agreement with the opposition after its leader Morgan Tsvangirai forces a run-off vote against Mugabe, but withdraws after violence against his supporters*
- *2013 Mugabe wins general elections amidst brutal suppression of the opposition*
- *Mugabe fires fellow party veteran Emmerson Mnangagwa, military puts him under house arrest, after impeachment process is started Mugabe resigns*

President Zuma of South Africa in his capacity as chairperson of SADC despatched two of his ministers as special SADC envoys to be actively involved in the negotiations with Mugabe as mediators. Some sources said they were taking sides in insisting that the military returned power to Mugabe. But this could not be confirmed.

Five days after the "non-coup", on November 19th, the government party ZANU-PF removed Mugabe as party president and replaced him with Emmerson Mnangagwa who is also supposed to take his position as State President. When Mugabe was not willing to resign the party started procedures to impeach him. That convinced him to choose resignation instead of an embarrassing impeachment ending his 37 years old rule. As part of the deal he was granted immunity from prosecution and full security while staying in Zimbabwe. Mnangagwa who had fled to South Africa after his removal returned triumphal to Harare and was sworn in as state president on November 24.

The people of Zimbabwe are not concerned about constitutional matters, if it was a coup or not. They celebrated the removal of Mugabe and his wife Grace. They make both responsible for the wide spread corruption and mismanagement of the economy. And they have well in mind how the Mugabe regime manipulated the last elections through intimidation of the opposition.

The next presidential and parliamentary elections will take place in July next year. If fair elections are envisaged it would be best to form a government of national unity to get the economy moving and to create a secure and peaceful country. The electoral laws need to be revised and the electoral roll to be updated. Already in 2008 SADC forced a power sharing agreement on Zimbabwe leading to a unity government under which the economy recovered substantially. However, during the time of that unity government Mugabe never gave up full control of the security forces and the media. Morgan Tsvangirai as leader of the opposition in the position of Prime Minister was not even able to protect his own party members from prosecution and arrest. Subsequently, Mugabe won the 2013 parliamentary elections which the *Economist* termed "rigged". The opposition parties must be certain that the mistakes of the 2008 power sharing agreement are not repeated and that sharing means to include the opposition in the control of the security establishment.

But a unity government is unlikely. ZANU-PF is convinced that the party rightfully won the election in 2013 and that it is the legitimate government. Why should they share this power with anyone? The coup of the military was not about removing a dictatorial president or to re-establish or to strengthen democracy in Zimbabwe. It was a move in the succession question when an outsider to the party, Mrs. Mugabe, thought she could by-pass the party establishment. It was a "smart coup"¹ because the military could count on the support of the population which helped to overcome the resistance in the party to remove a sitting president through an unconstitutional act. And it was a pre-emptive strike to safeguard the interests of the military class and their careers.

The military has always been the power behind Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF. It was responsible for the massacre of thousands of civilians in Matebeleland in 1980 and again in 2008 suppressed the opposition through torture, killings and disappearances. The UN has implicated Mnangagwa and the military in the illegal plundering of resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The disappearance of the revenues from the diamond fields in Marange (\$2 billion in 2012 alone)² would not be possible without the military's cooperation.

The Zimbabwean economy has been in a continuous decline since 2000. The government resorted to printing more and more money resulting in a hyperinflation. In 2008 the Zimbabwean dollar had to be scrapped in favour of a basket of currencies which meant in effect the reign of the US Dollar. At present the government issues "bond notes" which have no value outside the country and nobody trusts them. The financial system would collapse at once if the South African power supplier ESKOM would insist that Zimbabwe actually pays for electricity supplied. Economic policy is dominated by ideological considerations. Once the bread basket of Southern Africa agricultural production collapsed after white farmers were expropriated and commercial farming replaced by subsistence farming. Indigenisation laws require that mines are owned 51% by Zimbabweans resulting in foreign investors shying away from the country. Million Zimbabweans have fled to South Africa for jobs while the unemployment rate in the country rose to a shocking 95%.

¹ Enock C. Mudzamiri: *Zimbabwe beware: the military is looking after its own interests, not democracy* in The Conversation, 21.11.2017

² Kristen van Schie: *Zimbabwe: Marange diamond fields firms ,captured' by sinister spooks, state elites* in Daily Maverick, 10.09.2017

The coup d'état has blown away Zimbabwe's façade as a constitutional state. The military put a person in the top job who is one of them and because of this background and dependency the question remains if the new President Mnangagwa will have the power to reform the country against vested interests, if he is willing to do so at all. In an interview with the *Economist* he claims that he would reverse the racist indigenisation of the business ownership law, that he would try some kind of settlement for white farmers acknowledging that their skills are needed and he even hinted at the possibility of a unity government.

For the suffering Zimbabweans one can only hope that he sticks to his promises and would become the figure head of a new prosperous era and not the steward for vested interests.