

Leadership Change Underway in Zimbabwe after Resignation of President Robert Mugabe

“Operation Restore Legacy” spearheaded by ZDF removes 37-years-long leader in 8 days

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A factional struggle inside the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party has created the conditions for the resignation of longtime leader President Robert Gabriel Mugabe on November 21.

Through a project entitled “Operation Restore Legacy”, the president was removed from his leadership position as first secretary of the party along with being the head-of-state of the Republic of Zimbabwe within a matter of eight days.

The removal of the first secretary and president on the surface appeared to have been the outcome of divisions within ZANU-PF where rival elements surrounding the former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa on the one side, and First Lady Grace Mugabe on the other, reached an impasse stemming from irreconcilable differences. President Mugabe was in the concluding months of his present term of office scheduled to expire in mid-2018.

President Mugabe had joined the national liberation movement at a young age while working as an educator and youth leader in the former British settler colonial outpost known as Rhodesia. During the late 1950s and early 1960s he had lived, worked and studied in the West African state of Ghana, the-then fountainhead of Pan-Africanism under Prime Minister and eventual President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

After spending a decade in prison in the 1960s and early 1970s, Mugabe relocated in Tanzania and Mozambique to work full time as a leader of ZANU. In 1979, he played a pioneering role alongside Zimbabwe African People’s Union Patriotic Front (ZAPU-PF), headed by former Vice President Joshua Nkomo, in the negotiations for the Lancaster House agreement paving the way towards non-racial democratic elections in April 1980 which brought Mugabe to power as prime minister of a coalition government in its first five years. The initial government included the remnants of the settler colonialists headed by former Prime Minister Ian Smith. By 1985, Zimbabwe had become a republic with ZANU-PF as the leading political party. In 1987, ZANU and ZAPU merged to form a unitary ruling party.

The divisions within ZANU-PF came to a head after the termination of Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa in early November. Mnangagwa was relieved of his duties after an incident in Bulawayo when First Lady Grace Mugabe was booed while speaking before a youth interface rally. These actions taken by the president’s office was said to have been in response to a plot to overthrow Mugabe by a faction in the party led by Mnangagwa.

In addition to the sacking of Mnangagwa, reports were circulated that at least 100 other

party officials were being examined for possible expulsion from both the organization and government. On November 13, Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) Commander General Constantino Chiwenga held a press conference along with 90 other military officers where he threatened intervention if the purges did not cease.

Tanks Move into the Streets of Harare

This military press conference was not covered by the state-run Herald newspaper or other ZANU-PF controlled media agencies. The following day, November 14, social media and foreign news bureaus began to report on irregular tank movements in the capital of Harare. Several hours after sundown stories began to emerge claiming that the Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) had seized the national Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) television station in preparation for a statement to the country. Rumors were rife throughout Zimbabwe, across Africa and the world that a military coup was underway inside the country.

Later on in the early morning hours of 4:00am Zimbabwe time on November 15, Major General S.B. Moyo went on television saying that there had not been a military coup. He said that President Mugabe remained head-of-state and that the security for the leader and his family were guaranteed. Moyo noted that the ZDF was only targeting “criminals” surrounding the president in order to prevent a further deterioration of the social situation which could become violent.

Several hours after this, President Jacob Zuma of the neighboring Republic of South Africa spoke with Mugabe on the telephone. Zuma relayed in an interview over the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) that President Mugabe told him he was confined to his residential home in the capital of Harare. He also told Zuma that no harm was done to him or his family.

Zuma is currently the chair of the regional 15-member Southern African Development Community (SADC). The following day on Thursday November 16, Zuma deployed the Minister of Defense Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula to sit in on mediation talks between Mugabe and the military. Photographs of the meeting which took place at State House in Harare were published on the website of the Zimbabwe Herald (Zimpapers).

Reports on Friday November 17 showed Mugabe presiding over a graduation ceremony at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). Nonetheless, by Sunday November 19, there were dispatches sent out in the international press saying the ZANU-PF Central Committee had voted to recall the president from leadership and consequently as head-of-state. These same reports also emphasized that the First Lady Grace Mugabe was being expelled from the party.

Party and War Veterans Call for Mugabe’s Removal

In these same articles, it was said that Mugabe had until Monday November 20 to step down from office. The president addressed the nation and the world on Sunday November 19 where he acknowledged the factional conflict within the ZANU-PF party. However, he did not resign and alluded to the upcoming special congress of the party in which he said as first secretary would preside over.

Another press conference had been held on November 15 after Moyo’s television statement

and the eventual broadcast of Chiwenga's remarks from two days earlier. The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veteran's Association (ZNLWVA) said in the press conference at Club Chambers in Harare that they supported the actions taken by the military leadership and would hold a demonstration on November 18 in Harare. Spokespersons for ZNLWVA also accused leading ZANU-PF and government officials associated with the party faction aligned with First Lady Grace Mugabe of being criminals and even Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives.



Zimbabwe Senator Monica and ZNLWVA Leader Christopher Mutsvangwa

After the deadline set by the ZANU-PF Central Committee passed on November 20, impeachment resolutions were threatened by party Members of Parliament. On November 21, a series of charges were spelt out by Senator Monica Mutsvangwa of Manicaland Province accusing the president of several constitutional violations.

This impeachment resolution language read by Mutsvangwa said in part:

"President Mugabe is old and he needs to be hand held. As such, he is no longer fit for office.... The President has abrogated his constitutional mandate to his wife who makes public utterances on issues of government like the appointing and dismissal of Government Ministers and senior civil servants. This motion is moved in terms of Section 97 (1) which provides for the removal of The President or Vice President from office. The charges are (a) Serious misconduct; (b) Failure to obey, uphold or defend this Constitution; (c) Willful violation of this Constitution; or (d) Inability to perform the functions of the office because of physical or mental incapacity."

Later the debate on the impeachment resolution was terminated after the House Speaker Jacob Mudenda read out a letter said to have been from Mugabe tendering his resignation. Through international media outlets scenes of jubilation were shown for several hours in the streets of Harare. The resignation letter was later published in the Zimbabwe Herald along with reports that Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko was now acting president until Mnangagwa could be sworn in by Friday November 24.

International Implications of "Operation Restore Legacy"

Judging from the response of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) the government in London was delighted with the removal of Mugabe from the leadership of ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwe state. However, the former colonial power is quick to advise the new government in Harare on how it should proceed.

British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson said in a Twitter post that he does not regret Mugabe's downfall, calling the resignation "a moment of hope for the people of Zimbabwe". This echoed the remarks of Prime Minister Theresa May who said that the sudden removal of Mugabe would "forge a new path free of the oppression that characterized his rule. In recent days we have seen the desire of the Zimbabwean people for free and fair elections and the opportunity to rebuild the country's economy under a legitimate government." (Al Jazeera, Nov. 21)

A BBC article arrogantly inquired on November 22:

"So, will Emmerson Mnangagwa be able to take Zimbabwe's economy off life support and at least start to put it on the road to recovery? Analysts are very skeptical that a quick solution is even feasible. The euphoria that has gripped the nation has certainly raised hopes that the future will be brighter, but if that improved sentiment is to deliver economic dividends, the government needs to make some drastic reforms. In 2009, Mr. Mugabe signed the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act (IEEA) into law, which aimed to place 51% of companies into the hands of Black Zimbabweans."

The IEEA was a response to the dominance of the Zimbabwe economy by British settlers and foreign corporations. A land redistribution program enacted in 2000 set off the deepening of sanctions against Harare because the ZANU-PF government sought to give the land back to its rightful owners who had been victimized by the onslaught of British imperialism in the late 19th century.

As it relates to the role of the United States in the recent developments in Zimbabwe, the Voice of America (VOA) acknowledged in a report published on November 21 that the State Department has been conducting what it described as "behind the scenes talks" with officials of the ZANU-PF government and western-backed opposition forces inside the country. The article outlines some of the preconditions set down by Washington for lifting sanctions on the Southern African state which has relied upon the Republic of South Africa, the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Republic of Mozambique, the People's Republic of China and other fraternal states in order to stave off an already dire economic situation imposed by imperialism.

Nike Ching of the VOA writes:

"The way for Washington to lift sanctions is for Harare to carry out the due process, to respect human rights, and to give the opposition a genuine opportunity to form a government, said (Donald) Yamamoto (the U.S. Undersecretary for African Affairs). 'What we don't want is a manipulation by the government or by the ruling ZANU-PF party - holding rush elections, not taking into consideration a lot of the reform issues that the opposition wants to implement; also, not giving political space for the Zimbabwe people for them to express what they want to see in a new government,' he said. U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe Harry Thomas has been meeting with officials from the ZANU-PF party and the opposition party behind the scenes to try and help

push the political process forward.”

Both SADC and the African Union (AU) have expressed concerns over events in Zimbabwe emanating from “Operation Restore Legacy.” Zimbabwe under Mugabe has been an ideological and political base for Pan-Africanism and anti-imperialism on the continent.

In this same above-mentioned report in Al Jazeera, it says:

“Alpha Conde, president of Guinea and African Union (AU) chief, said it is ‘a shame’ Mugabe ‘has to leave through the back door.’ He added, however, that he was ‘very pleased’ with Mugabe’s decision to resign, noting that the AU had warned against a coup in Zimbabwe. Hailing Mugabe’s role in Zimbabwe’s fight for independence, Conde called Mugabe ‘an African hero.’ Mugabe will never be forgotten, he was a great fighter,’ he was quoted as saying by Guinean media.”

One opposition media agency, Bulawayo 24, published an unsubstantiated report saying that neighboring Zambian President Edgar Lungu was willing to militarily intervene in Zimbabwe to place his troops under Mugabe’s command. Western-backed entities have emerged on the streets of Harare as well carrying signs attacking both the AU and SADC as was in evidence during the demonstrations on November 18. (Nov. 16)

Critical Issues for the Future of Zimbabwe

At least four important aspects of ZANU-PF’s domestic and foreign policy will be important to observe in the days and weeks to come in order to assess the direction of the Mnangagwa government.



Zimbabwe ZANU-PF figures involved in factional disputes includes Grace Mugabe, Emmerson Mnangagwa and President Mugabe

The land reform program, popularly referred to as the “Third Chimurenga”, has been a cornerstone of domestic policy since 2000. Will the land redistribution project be maintained, moderated or reversed?

Secondly, the Indigenization policy is important for all post-colonial states in Africa due to

the dominance of foreign capital over the national and regional economies. Neo-colonialism has failed to provide genuine independence, sustainable growth and development across the continent.

Another major question is whether Zimbabwe can maintain its commitment to regional integration and industrialization, both within SADC and the AU. Mugabe served as Chair of the AU in 2015 advancing the cause of economic integration and independence from western capitalist states. Just earlier this year, the president presented a fundraising check for \$1million to the AU in order to set an example for individual state commitment to the continental body.

Finally, Pentagon military involvement in Africa has grown substantially over the last decade with the formation of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). The Mugabe government has kept AFRICOM out of the country.

The presence of AFRICOM in Somalia, Niger, Mali, Nigeria and other AU member-states has not resulted in greater security and social stability. Quite the opposite has occurred with burgeoning instability, economic crises and population displacement.

Ultimately, it is up to the Zimbabwe people themselves to chart a future course. Nevertheless, despite the apparent errors of the recent period the legacy of Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF remains a sterling example of national liberation, Pan-Africanism and struggle against imperialism throughout the world.

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