



After Robert Mugabe: What now?

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What happened?

After 37 years in power in Zimbabwe – first as Prime Minister and then as President – Robert Gabriel Mugabe, who turns 94 years next year, resigned as head of state on Tuesday, 21 November 2017.

This was preceded by a bloodless coup under the leadership of General Constantino Chiwenga, Commander-in-Chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Force (ZDF). The commanders of the Police Force were apparently not involved.

This was precipitated by Mugabe's sacking of the Deputy President of State, Mr Emmerson Mnangagwa, some two weeks before. The assumption was that President Mugabe had planned to promote his own wife, Grace Marufu-Mugabe, to this vacancy, making it possible for her rise to the presidency once he retired from office.

Meanwhile, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) – ZANU-PF – had decided, in collaboration with opposition parties, to institute impeachment procedures in parliament against the president.

And if successfully impeached, Robert Mugabe would have forfeited any retirement benefits. But by 'resigning voluntarily' he may still qualify for the retention of whatever benefits (and properties) he may have acquired during this term of office. One institution that should be fully aware of these details is the Reserve Bank, as it was specifically kept under ZANU-PF control throughout Mugabe's rule.

Why his removal?

Neither the military nor the ruling party (ZANU-PF) was willing to endorse the 'controversial wife' of the president as future head of state. Her only significant support came from the 'G40' faction as well as the police. And the only way to prevent this from happening was to make sure that Emmerson Mnangagwa remained Vice-President and logical successor to the throne. For this, the support of the party and military was crucial.

Who is Emmerson Mnangagwa?

The Vice-President is 76 years of age – also a Mashonaland – and a life-long supporter of Mugabe. Like Mugabe he was detained during the years of white minority rule in the former Rhodesia.

Both underwent military training in the People's Republic of China (Communist China) during the 1960s. After independence in 1980 he served in all Mugabe's cabinets and became the 'enforcer' of the Matabeleland massacres (the so-called Gukurahundi) of the early 1980s.

When Laurent Kabila, the embattled president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was attacked by rebels from Uganda and Rwanda in 1998, Robert Mugabe offered the ZDF as an ally of Kabila. The rewards would be resource-sharing, in this case copper, cobalt, diamonds and coltan from the eastern DRC: the Kivu Provinces. This became so lucrative that Robert Mugabe tasked Emmerson Mnangagwa to establish an entity called Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI) to manage this enterprise. Other members of the executive (the military, the police, the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) and later the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company) became shareholders of the ZDI.

The next round of enrichment for Zimbabwe's élites came with the land invasions of white-owned farms after 2000. Mnangagwa was a major beneficiary. Other beneficiaries included President and Mrs Robert Mugabe (16 farms), Senator Edna Madzongwe (six farms), Minister Ignatius Chombo (five farms), Minister Kembo Mohadi (four farms), Minister Obert Mpofu (three farms), Minister Saviour Kasukweru (two farms), Robert Mugabe's sister Sabina (three farms), and General Constantino Chiwenga and his wife Jocelyn (one big flower and potato farm outside Harare). This patrimonial relationship implies that the military has become a custodian of Mugabe/ZANU-PF rule and may not be willing to relinquish power at the polls, as happened in 2000 and 2008 when ZANU-PF actually lost to the opposition but remained in power thanks to the war veterans and the police.

No wonder that Section 72 of the new Constitution (of 2013) implies that land reform was irreversible. But the Mugabes also obtained special interests in commercial entities such as Gushongo Holdings and Alpha Omega Dairies, and are using the Queensway Group of Hong Kong as a conduit for their assets in South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai. This information is known to the Reserve Bank, and probably to Mnangagwa as well.

What now?

The military and other ZANU-PF stakeholders in the 'Defence Industries' complex must have thought that Grace Mugabe and the 'G40' (including the Police) have become too arrogant at the expense of Mnangagwa. It is crucial that the Reserve Bank (not the Treasury/Finance) should in due course expose what it knows about the foreign assets/money laundering of privileged people. It could even consider offering indemnity from prosecution/expropriation in exchange for truth (what about a Zimbabwean TRC?) The question remains whether an 'exit package' was negotiated with Mugabe and/or his wife.

All along economic recovery is imperative. The economy needs certainty (and trust) on at least the following points: agriculture and land reform, transparency on mining rights, flexibility on indigenisation policies, and banking recovery. New investors from South Africa, Britain, China and Nigeria must be found, people like Aliko Dangote, the richest Nigerian, who is already showing interest.

Special incentives should also be designed for the return of talented members of the two to three million members of the Zimbabwean diaspora now living in South Africa, Botswana, Australia and the UK, or anywhere else.

Constitutionally, the next phase may be setting up a government of national unity and holding the next elections by mid-2018. But with a divided opposition, ZANU-PF should win again. Whether Mnangagwa will govern better than this predecessor is an open question. Only time will tell.