

Campaign to force out Mugabe escalates in Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe's war veterans' association is staging a march today through the capital, Harare, demanding the resignation of President Robert Mugabe. Tens of thousands are expected to take part after all ten of the country's provincial Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) branches passed motions of no confidence in Mugabe.

Mugabe refused to step down yesterday and was briefly released from house arrest to make his first public appearance since the army staged a palace coup early Wednesday.

His appearance in the role of chancellor of the Open University at a graduation ceremony in Harare was designed to lend an appearance of normalcy to an enforced transition of power to the faction of the ruling ZANU-PF led by its former vice president, Emmanuel Mnangagwa. The president's wife, Grace Mugabe, was not present at the ceremony.

Mugabe, now 93, sacked Mnangagwa last week to pave the way for Grace Mugabe, 52, to assume power. She heads the G40 faction of younger bourgeois layers in the ruling elite. The army, under the leadership of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces commander, General Constantino Chiwenga, moved to back Mnangagwa and call a halt to efforts by Mugabe to sideline or remove from office members of the old guard tied to the military.

The military issued statements via Zimbabwe state media stressing their respect for Mugabe and citing progress in talks “with the Commander-in-Chief President Robert Mugabe on the way forward.” But the talks are being held at gunpoint and a senior member of ZANU-PF warned, “If he becomes stubborn, we will arrange for him to be fired on Sunday... When that is done, it's impeachment on Tuesday.”

The chairman of the war veterans' association, Chris Mutsvangwa, a key ally of Mnangagwa, has been at the forefront of demands for Mugabe to go, and go quickly.

Mutsvangwa boasted that “the war veterans of Zimbabwe... have the full support of the war veterans of South Africa, the government of South Africa... we are giving a very strong warning to Mugabe and his wife, he is done, finished. He won't be allowed to continue... He has to make a decision today to leave... If he doesn't leave, we will settle the scores tomorrow.”

He told the media that three cabinet ministers under Mugabe—Higher Education Minister Jonathan Moyo, Local Government Minister Saviour Kasukuwere and Finance Minister Ignatious Chombo—“are in jail” along with others. Moyo was scheduled to attend the graduation ceremony with Mugabe, but did not appear.

Grace Mugabe's actual whereabouts are disputed.

According to various reports, Chombo was detained at the King George VI military barracks after a fire-fight that left several bodyguards dead, while Moyo is on the run. The minister of foreign affairs, Walter Mzembe, has not returned from a trip to neighbouring Zambia. Masvingo Provincial Affairs Minister, Paul Chimedza, was arrested on Thursday at an army roadblock. Unconfirmed reports say that the Women's League secretary for administration, Letina Undengem, is also detained.

Central Intelligence Organisation Director Albert Miles Nguluvhe was released on Thursday, with a senior military official stating that he was not a member of the G40 faction and that he had been arrested to “alienate him” from the president.

ZANU-PF National Youth League Secretary Kudzanai Chipanga is in military custody. He made a televised apology to military chief Chiwenga for criticising his earlier threats to intervene to stop purges within the party leadership. “We are still young people. We are still growing up and learning from our mistakes,” he said.

The army maintains a blockade around key buildings, including the presidential palace as well as Mugabe's own home—site of current negotiations between Mugabe and

Chiwenga, brokered by South African Minister of Defence Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and State Security Minister Bongani Bongo. Mnangagwa fled to South Africa after being removed from his post by Mugabe.

Lending its backing to the military alongside the ANC government of Jacob Zuma is China. Beijing said Thursday that its “friendly policy” toward Zimbabwe would not change. Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing in Beijing: “We will continue to develop friendly cooperation with Zimbabwe on an equal, mutually beneficial win-win cooperation principle.”

Several news sources, including CNN and Britain’s *Guardian*, expressed concern that China was behind the coup and would be its main beneficiary. Noting the visit to Beijing last Friday by Chiwenga, Simon Tisdall listed China’s “extensive investments in the mining, agriculture, energy and construction sectors,” claiming that the “pre-independence guerrilla force led to victory by Robert Mugabe... was financed and armed by the Chinese in the 1970s. Close ties have continued to the present day.”

The general concern is that China has established an economic foothold in Zimbabwe as a result of Western sanctions from 2002 onwards. President Xi Jinping’s government seems to have been persuaded that Mugabe should be removed as a result of the combined impact of measures taken last year—the “indigenisation laws”—directed against overseas investors, including in diamond mining, and by Zimbabwe’s worsening economic crisis, with inflation at 50 percent a month and a government deficit of \$1.82 billion.

Chiwenga and Mnangagwa have enjoyed friendly relations with China stretching back decades. Mnangagwa was trained in Beijing and Nanjing in the 1960s. Tisdall cites an interview Mnangagwa gave to the Chinese state broadcaster CCTV two years ago in which he stressed, to clear effect, “We must know that investment can only go where it gets a return, so we must make sure we create an environment where investors are happy to put their money.”

It is this geopolitical threat, rather than hypocritical concerns regarding Mnangagwa’s record of brutality against ZANU-PF’s opponents, or a supposed desire for a “democratic transformation,” that accounts for the cautious reaction of the United States, Britain and other Western powers to the coup.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told parliament, “Nobody wants simply to see the transition from one

unelected tyrant to a next. No one wants to see that. We want to see proper, free and fair elections.”

Members of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s Africa subcommittee stated, “While a change in leadership is long overdue, we are concerned about the military’s actions. We urge the leaders of the Zimbabwe Defense Forces to ensure the protection of all citizens and a transparent return to civilian control.”

US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto told Reuters, “It’s a transition to a new era for Zimbabwe, that’s really what we’re hoping for.”

The German government concurred, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Rainer Breul calling on all parties to work together to reach a peaceful solution. Mindful of how sanctions had benefited China, Stefan Liebich of the opposition Left Party advised against imposing any fresh penalties. According to *Deutsche Welle*, he suggested that Germany “assert its influence as a creditor, making future loans to Zimbabwe conditional on a peaceful change of power.”

What Washington, London, et al. want from any new regime is the incorporation of forces loyal to themselves and not to Beijing.

J. Peter Pham, director of the influential Atlantic Council think tank’s Africa Centre, wrote on the council’s website: “Indications are that [Mnangagwa] may seek to form some sort of ‘unity government,’ possibly with the participation of the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) faction loyal to [Morgan] Tsvangirai, with whom he reportedly developed a good relationship in recent years... It will behoove us to wait and see what his first steps are and reserve judgment.”

Tsvangirai was elected secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in 1998 and founded the MDC in 2000 ostensibly to challenge Mugabe for the presidency. But behind his pose as a workers’ leader stood industrialists, large landowners and the imperialist powers, for whom the MDC still speaks.



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