

Zimbabwe: Factional warfare continues after Mugabe fails to resign

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Robert Mugabe defied all expectations last night by not announcing that he was standing down as president in a televised address to the nation.

Mugabe shared a platform with the military leaders who just five days earlier staged a palace coup, rounding up the key political supporters of his wife Grace Mugabe's G40 faction of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Mugabe himself had been placed under house arrest.

With the military staging a demonstration in the capital Harare on Saturday that attracted hundreds of thousands, including all of the opposition parties, and his ZANU-PF party removing him as leader and expelling his wife from the party earlier that day, Mugabe still refused to go.

In a long speech, made at times haltingly, Mugabe praised the military as the guardian of peace and security, as well as the constitutional order and of the traditions of the independence struggle, but nevertheless declared, "The (ZANU-PF) Congress is due a few weeks from now. I will preside over its processes, which must not be possessed by any acts calculated to undermine it or compromise the outcomes in the eyes of the public."

ZANU-PF's Central Committee had earlier appointed former vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa as interim leader and named him as their favoured candidate to assume the post of Zimbabwe's president. A key ally of Mnangagwa and leader of the powerful Veterans Association, Chris Mutsvangwa, backed up an official threat to impeach Mugabe if he did not quit by noon today with a more sinister threat that the military would allow him to be attacked if he refused to go.

Mutsvangwa told Britain's *Daily Mail*, "The army gave the dictator a message earlier [Saturday]. Either he steps down or they will let the people into his mansion to take him. The army is threatening to unleash the people and let Mugabe be lynched. The generals said they will not shoot the people for him. Instead, they will abandon their posts and leave him to his fate."

Mutsvangwa has now said that impeachment proceedings

will proceed today and a mass demonstration will take place Wednesday.

Mugabe, who made an appeal for tolerance and forgiveness, is widely assumed to be seeking to protect Grace Mugabe and the rest of his family from retribution by offering to preside over a smooth transition. But he also calculates that he has a stronger hand to play than appearances would suggest.

In the first instance, Mugabe still enjoys some popular support, especially in the countryside. Any obvious ill treatment by the military could backfire by arousing sympathy for the 93-year-old leader whom these same forces until recently held to be the "father of the nation."

Moreover, despite the euphoric scenes in Harare on Saturday, what is unfolding in Zimbabwe is not the "second revolution," which was a popular slogan at Saturday's rally, but an attempted palace coup, which both sides in the immediate struggle and their backers behind the scenes are anxious to prevent from spinning out of control.

A major consideration in seeking a smooth transition is the economic impact of continued instability. The *Global Times* warned, "As the largest trading partner of Zimbabwe and its largest foreign investor, China will inevitably see its interests affected by the chaos. According to the Xinhua News Agency, the Zimbabwe Investment Authority approved \$929 million in foreign direct investment in 2015, with more than half of that from China."

Prior to staging the coup, General Constantino Chiwenga visited Beijing for talks with leading Chinese military and political figures. Mnangagwa was already there, having fled there via Mozambique after being removed from his post by Mugabe. A report by *New Zimbabwe* quoted a military source saying that Mnangagwa's escape to China was made possible by Mutsvangwa, who "facilitated the journey."

Speculation is rife over whether China organised the coup, but Beijing is generally assumed to be anxious for someone to provide the political and economic stability that Mugabe has proved incapable of securing.

As part of efforts to promote the interests of the aspiring

younger layer of Zimbabwean capitalists for whom Generation 40 is named, Mugabe cancelled lucrative Chinese contracts in diamond mining and other areas. This was presented as part of a policy of “indigenisation” of the economy. China has extensive investments in mining, agriculture, energy and the construction sectors.

The *Washington Post* cited Yun Sun from the Stimson Center in Washington stating, “Mugabe’s preferences for nationalisation and indigenisation in his economic policies, plus his domestic political turmoil, had made China’s large investment in Zimbabwe look risky and led to ‘complaints and grievances’ in Beijing. China wouldn’t actively support a plot to get rid of Mugabe, Sun said, ‘but if there is a domestic campaign to make him gone, China won’t be cheering for him, either.’”

After making his appeal to Beijing, Mnangagwa went to South Africa for talks with the African National Congress and its leader Jacob Zuma. South Africa’s investments in Zimbabwe may not be as important as China’s, but its political support is vital to any putative government.

Zuma sent two of his top aides to negotiate a peaceful transition from Mugabe to Mnangagwa on Friday. He fears that the destabilisation of Zimbabwe would impact heavily on South Africa, and more broadly throughout the continent.

The Southern Africa Development Community meets in Angola on Tuesday to discuss the Zimbabwe situation, also involving Angola, Tanzania and Zambia. But there are suggestions that South Africa is taking a cautious approach, in part because of concern for economic interests it shares with Russia. On November 17, the influential *Zimbabwe Mail* ran an article citing investments that pit Russian influence against China’s.

It noted that the ALROSA group of diamond mining companies is invested in several projects in Zimbabwe. More importantly, Russia and South Africa together control about 80 percent of the world’s reserves of platinum group metals and are seeking to control prices and supply.

However, “According to the Chamber of Mines of Zimbabwe (CMZ) and geologists, Zimbabwe has far bigger platinum reserves than Russia. The country currently has the second known largest platinum reserves after South Africa.”

With Zimbabwe seeking to increase production to 500,000 ounces per annum and needing investments of close to \$3 billion to do so, a rich prize is there for the taking. Zimplats, one of the top three producers in Zimbabwe, is a unit of South Africa’s Impala Platinum. But, according to the *Mail*, further investment was hampered for Russia and South Africa by “indigenisation and empowerment regulations which compel foreign-owned companies to sell [a] 51 percent stake to locals.”

Speaking from South Africa on the situation in Zimbabwe,

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuriy Trutnev tacitly blamed Mugabe for the military takeover, saying, “In most cases, instability emerges when people are not satisfied with their lives. That’s why it is necessary to attract money to the country in order to ensure stability, to attract investors, to create new enterprises.”

Significantly, Sunday’s talks did not include the South African government delegation that took part in the first round, consisting of Minister of Defence Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and State Security Minister Bongani Bongo.

The United States is concerned that events are unfolding without its own political proxies, such as Morgan Tsvangirai of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, taking centre stage. Hence the demands for a swift transition to civilian rule, which it hopes will bring some form of power-sharing.

Speaking Friday at a meeting with three dozen African foreign ministers in Washington, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told those gathered, “[W]e all should work together for a quick return to civilian rule in that country in accordance with their constitution.”

What is not spoken of by most commentators is the impact of Mugabe’s downfall on the expectations of Zimbabwe’s workers and young people. The military, ZANU-PF, and the opposition parties are all promising democratic and economic rebirth, even as they plot to ensure their own continued rule and the hiving off of Zimbabwe’s key assets to various global investors. Under these circumstances, the false unity evident at Saturday’s anti-Mugabe rally will inevitably give way to renewed political and social conflict.



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