

Zimbabwe: Defying calls to step down, Mugabe faces impeachment

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After ignoring a mid-Monday deadline to resign, impeachment proceedings were initiated against President Robert Mugabe by Zimbabwe's ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), after the military staged a palace coup on Saturday and placed Mugabe under house arrest. Mugabe was widely expected to step down on Sunday.

After Mugabe failed to tender his resignation, ZANU-PF's deputy secretary for legal affairs, Paul Mangwana, declared that lawmakers would submit a motion for impeachment before parliament and vote Mugabe out, possibly as soon as Wednesday. Mangwana also declared that he had secured the votes of the opposition party, Movement For Democratic Change (MDC), assuring the majority necessary for Mugabe's impeachment.

The central charge against Mugabe in the impeachment draft is that "Mugabe allowed his wife to usurp power" and that the president, at age 93, "is too old to even walk without assistance."

The political crisis in Harare began with Mugabe's sacking of Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa on November 6. Mugabe had made preparations to install his wife Grace as president when he left office, presumably after his death.

Grace Mugabe holds the popular support of the younger generation of ZANU-PF, embodied by the G40, a section of the ruling class so named for the constitutional amendment allowing anyone over 40 years of age to run for president. Nearly the entire leadership of G40 have been arrested, and Grace Mugabe has reportedly fled to Namibia.

Mugabe's move to install Grace as president incurred the ire of the country's military leadership, which erupted into open political warfare with his sacking of Vice President Mnangagwa on November 6. The

military, in seeking to give its removal of Mugabe a veneer of legality and to avoid accusations of staging a coup, have appealed to Mugabe to voluntarily resign. Having the support of the army, Mnangagwa is expected to take power.

After the army took control of the country on Saturday, the War Veterans Association led by Chris Mutsvangwa rallied thousands of demonstrators in the capital city of Harare demanding the resignation of Mugabe. The War Veterans Association, an organization of soldiers who fought the struggle for independence which brought Mugabe to power in 1980, has taken undeserved political advantage of the widespread contempt of the masses for Mugabe to promote Mnangagwa to replace him.

The Zimbabwean military, meanwhile, appears anxious primarily to avoid its intervention provoking any popular movement among the masses. Gen. Constantino Chiwenga, who led the army's intervention last week, issued a warning Monday that ZANU-PF, the war veterans, the opposition and the people of Zimbabwe should not take any actions that "threaten peace, life and property."

Sources familiar with the thinking among the military commanders indicated that they were not insisting on Mugabe's immediate resignation, but rather wanted a "smooth transition" that precluded any eruption of social and political struggle. The *Financial Times* of London quoted an official familiar with the thinking of the military command as saying that if the move for Mugabe's precipitous ouster continued, "There's a possibility the army might try to stop ZANU-PF forcefully, and that might result in blood on the streets."

The United States and Europe, while supporting Mugabe's removal, voiced their fears that the coup

staged by the army could create further chaos, especially in the event that Mugabe is persistent in his refusal to step down, which could spiral out of control. Mugabe is still regarded as a popular figure, as one of the last living “liberation” leaders on the continent.

In calling for a “new era” in Zimbabwe, acting US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto called for Mugabe to step down, indicating that Washington would not countenance his maintaining a transitional role in the government.

Washington has signaled that it wants a role in any new government for the MDC party and its leader Morgan Tsvangirai, who was backed by the US during elections held in 2008. Mugabe was declared the winner amid evidence of fraud, although the MDC won a majority of seats in the parliament. The Mugabe government responded with a bloody crackdown on the political opposition, with security forces committing rapes, torture, forced disappearances and murder.

Mugabe incurred the ire of Washington with the campaign of “indigenization” in 1986, a program which consisted of “nationalizations” of foreign companies and property. Relations with the US further soured in 2000, and the Clinton administration imposed economic sanctions against the Harare government. With the end of Mugabe’s rule, Washington is hoping to reestablish economic ties and assert its dominance over a new regime in Harare.

As the result of US sanctions, Zimbabwe sought out and developed significant trade relations with Beijing, in which Chinese firms have invested vast sums, namely in the country’s mining sector. Washington aims to reverse Beijing’s economic dominance in Harare.

“Our position has always been that if they engage in the constitutional reforms, economic and political reforms, and move forward to protecting political space and the human rights, then we can start the dialogue on lifting sanctions,” Yamamoto said.

Dangling the potential for a resumption of US aid if a new regime in Harare submits to US dominance, he added, “Now whether we give to the government, that depends on what happens in Zimbabwe.”

In reality, what Yamamoto means is that improved economic relations with the United States depend on the new government agreeing to Washington’s dictates to remove any restrictions on the exploitation of

Zimbabwe’s significant mineral wealth and working masses for the profit of American banks and corporations.

In indicating Britain’s support for Mugabe’s removal, James Slack, spokesperson for Prime Minister Theresa May, stated that Mugabe has lost the support of the Zimbabwean people. Slack stated, “We don’t yet know how developments in Zimbabwe are going to play out. What does appear clear is that Mugabe has lost the support of the people and of his party.”

Expressing Britain’s concern that the military takeover could disrupt the flow of profits, not just in Zimbabwe, but also the potential for the political chaos to spread beyond the country’s borders, particularly to South Africa, Slack said, “[We] would appeal for everyone to refrain from violence and hope to see a peaceful and swift resolution to the situation.”

In the final analysis, the Zimbabwean masses will find no relief from widespread social misery and political repression with the removal of Mugabe and the installation of Mnangagwa. After years of high inflation, chronic unemployment, and stark poverty, the political factions seeking to take the reins of power embodied in the ZANU-PF and MDC, both of which represent a wealthy Zimbabwean bourgeoisie determined to reap ever greater profits from Zimbabwe’s resources and working class, are unwilling and incapable of carrying out any program to improve the social conditions of the Zimbabwean population.



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