Zimbabwe-South Africa summit: The Butcher of Marikana meets the Crocodile

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President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his South African counterpart, Cyril Ramaphosa, are set to meet next month in the Zimbabwean capital of Harare against a backdrop of deepening economic crisis and rising social discontent in both neighbouring countries.

In South Africa, miners in Johannesburg are set to strike for the second time this year beginning today. *Independent Online* reported Friday that the Minerals Council South Africa was "deeply concerned about the potential consequences of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union's (Amcu) intention to embark on secondary strikes at mining companies next week… AMCU will down tools in the platinum and coal sectors in support of its members who have been on strike for three months in the gold sector at Sibanye-Stillwater."

Chief executive Roger Baxter said that 15 member-companies "had received notices of secondary strike action from Amcu with effect from the night shifts of February 28 and 29, to around March 7, 2019."

Sibanye-Stillwater miners are striking over wages and job cuts. The corporations have responded by threatening to fire striking miners.

In Zimbabwe, the situation is even more tense, with bread shortages putting a population already facing fuel price hikes, a currency shortage and a drought in a dire situation. The Grain Millers Association of Zimbabwe has warned that Zimbabwe has just a week's worth of wheat, forcing a 70 percent price rise in a loaf of bread. The currency shortage has made imports of flour impossible.

In the past weeks, tens of thousands of teachers struck to demand better conditions and a wage rise until the teachers' unions, working in tandem with the ZANU-PF government, forced them back to the classroom. This came after a major public sector "stayaway" called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), which backs the bourgeois opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The strike was met with brutal repression and arrests.

The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) estimates that 1,100 people were arrested during the ZCTU protest. At least 700 have appeared in court, where they were represented by lawyers from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR).

Mnangagwa has responded by denouncing doctors and lawyers as accessories to the January 14 stayaway for the "crime" of telling strikers "that if anyone gets arrested, they should go to a certain place, there are lawyers waiting to defend them. If anyone gets hurt, they should go to a certain place, there are doctors waiting to treat them."

He threatened, "We are now going after those doctors who were involved in those activities. Those lawyers that were inciting violence, we are now going after them. So those who choose violence, we are prepared."

Mnangagwa is preparing massive state repression, involving lethal force, to quell social dissent—describing strikes and protests as a "well-organized plan," engineered by "local NGOs well-funded and by the [MDC] opposition."

MDC leader Nelson Chamisa spoke to France 24 to deny that he was working with any foreign powers to unseat the ruling government—amid reports that he is demanding a rotating two-year presidency between himself and Mnangagwa.

For his part, former ZANU-PF leader and deposed president Robert Mugabe used his 95th birthday to denounce his former ally Mnangagwa for using the army to kill people. He speaks for a still powerful faction within ZANU-PF and the military, amid reports of renewed popularity due to the crisis that followed the coup that deposed him and placed Mnangagwa in power. Mugabe has even suggested throwing his weight behind Chamisa saying during last years' elections, "I said I can't vote for those who have caused me to be in this situation ... so

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there is Chamisa left."

Mnangagwa's threat against lawyers and doctors came less than a week after he reassigned four of his top generals to diplomatic posts. All four played a key role in the toppling of Mugabe in November 2017—Major-General Anselem Nhamo Sanyatwe, who was commander of the Presidential Guard, Air Vice-Marshall Shebba Shumbayawonda, Major-General Martin Chedondo and Major-General Douglas Nyikayaramba.

Mnangagwa is targeting anyone whose loyalty is suspect, especially those close to Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga, the former head of the armed forces who has stronger ties to the military than the former spy chief, Mnangagwa. The recent return of Chiwenga in full health from India guarantees that this factional confrontation will deepen.

With Mnangagwa under intense pressure from western imperialism to reorient Zimbabwe away from China and Russia, threatened by his own military power base, a bourgeois constituency that is increasingly fearful of being displaced by international capital and facing the growing resistance of the masses to the eternal assaults on their living standards, working conditions and dignity, further conflict is inevitable.

For his part, Ramaphosa began his career as the head of South Africa's largest union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and was elected African National Congress (ANC) general secretary in 1991, playing a central role in the multiparty negotiations that resulted in an end to legal apartheid white minority rule, while leaving capitalist interests intact. He used his influence as a union leader to promote the ANC, a bourgeois nationalist party, among black workers and was richly rewarded for his services. In the post-apartheid era, he has become one of South Africa's wealthiest figures, with a net worth of $675 million.

Hated as "the Butcher of Marikana" for having urged on the police assault that ended the lives of 47 miners striking against Lonmin, Ramaphosa sat on the board of directors as a non-executive director and owned substantial shares in the company.

Mnangagwa is also a billionaire, who made much of his money during his time as ZANU-PF finance minister and was described as "Zimbabwe's richest man" in US diplomatic cables made public by WikiLeaks. Known as "the Crocodile" for his role as an enforcer for Mugabe, he has his hands steeped in blood, playing a prominent role in the Gukurhundi Massacre between 1983 and 1987, which claimed over 20,000 lives.

Salivating at the prospect of growing their wealth exponentially, the two presidents are anxious to finally free Zimbabwe of Western sanctions so they can get down to business. According to a report by *Bulawayo24*, "an African Development Bank (AfDB) team will next month visit Zimbabwe for talks with the government over debt clearance systems and possibilities of further private sector loans."

This comes after ZANU-PF condemned the extension of existing sanctions against Zimbabwe by the European Union (EU), which stopped short of targeting individuals close to Mnangagwa.

Secretary for information and publicity, Simon Khaya Moyo, urged the EU to listen to the calls by the South African Development Community, the African Union and "the rest of the world" to unconditionally lift the sanctions. Mnangagwa for his part is desperate to prove that Zimbabwe is indeed, "Open for Business," having invited his counterpart to the country to prove this to the imperialist powers.

Making Mnangagwa's intentions to further ingratiate himself to Western imperialism clear, *Zim News* reports, "The party holds the firm position that the evidently genuine engagement and re-engagement efforts being pursued by Zimbabwe under the colossal stewardship of His Excellency the President CDE ED Mnangagwa deserves the support of the international community more particularly the EU and their Western allies."

Ramaphosa is seen as a reliable set of hands to help bring about the kind of economic restructuring the imperialist powers are looking for in Zimbabwe, with his visit prompting hope that Mnangagwa is finally willing to break with the system of patronage associated with Mugabe.

As EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini recently noted, "[T]he key question is to understand whether the old system has been dismantled … or it remains in place under a different leadership… All decisions on [sanctions] listings including new listings can be swiftly adopted if the situation requires it. We are monitoring the situation very closely and stand ready to adjust our decision."

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