



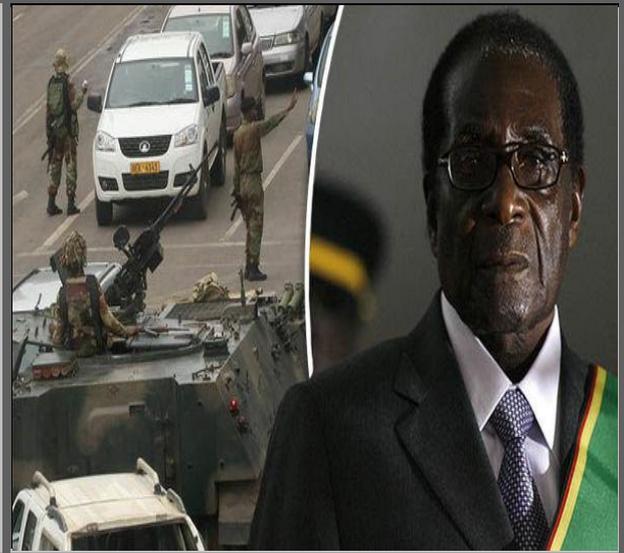
ZIMBABWE AT SOCIO-POLITICAL CROSSROADS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The recent political crises in Zimbabwe led to the ouster of veteran revolutionary leader Robert Mugabe as a result of his move to sideline Emmerson Mnangagwa, his Vice-President and possible successor, and replacing him with his wife Mrs. Grace Mugabe.

The Zimbabwean defense forces are caught in a quagmire where they technically cannot stage a 'coup' but practically have done so, by becoming a party to the conflict. In the past decade, Africa has witnessed a number of power transitions riding on the wave of democratic reform or popular uprising. Some have been a success, while others not. However, it is evident from Mr. Mugabe peaceful resignation and a backdoor exit that a deal had been brokered which ensured him a safe passage . What is also evident is that Africa needs to start "putting nations first" and solve their matters under constitutional legality through a peaceful dialogue among themselves.

Mr. Mugabe was once widely admired for fighting liberation struggle against the white rule in 1970s. He prospered into building and developing Zimbabwe, but unfortunately like every revolutionary leader he could not accept any challenge to his rule. The liberator turned dictator lost the plot as the country is now facing grave economic and food insecurity. At the age of 93, Mugabe knew soon he would have to find a successor and what better option than his own wife, Grace. Consequently, Mr. Mnangagwa who had always remain his trusted loyal and possible successor naturally revolted to the decision. With his close ties with the military, veteran officials and political elite he represents the status-quo better than lady Grace who finds her limited popularity among young politicians.

Interestingly, the popular opinions as it seems, favor military and Mnangagwa. On 18-19 November 2017, a huge (by Zimbabwean standards) protest was registered in Harare. A student of political science based in Harare shared that such a public outburst of anger against Mugabe was unprecedented. Moreover, he also observed that the very right of protest had turned people joyful and celebrations after his resignation on November 21, 2017 inspired a new beginning for the people of Zimbabwe. According to his analysis, the general public respected the military who was managing security at the protest and somehow unconsciously helping it turn into a nationwide moment.¹

While public opinion is very important, however, some other realities and actors will also have their impact on the ultimate situation and solution.

One important factor will be the involvement of external actors in the resolution of the current political crises and Southern African Development Community (SADC) is one such key player. SADC Organ Troika noted with great concern the unfolding situation in the Republic of Zimbabwe.² They reaffirmed SADC's commitment to African Union (AU) Constitutive Act and the SADC's Democratic Principles, as they relate to the unconstitutional removal of democratically elected governments. The only reason Zimbabwe military cannot call their soft intervention a 'coup' is because Zimbabwe is a member of SADC abiding by its Charter which does not allow military coup in member states. More so, military intervention and the 'coup' card is also not playing well with the African Union. However, the western countries are less concerned about the 'coup' and more about the power transition, as former United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan has said, "Zimbabwe has chances to experience genuine democracy."³

In South Africa, where President Jacob Zuma faced similar issues of internal political dissent that is now faced by Mugabe, is vocal on slamming unconstitutional takeover, and through SADC, is trying to mediate the situation.⁴ However, South Africa has not termed these political impasses as 'coup' which substantiates their mediatory efforts and playing both sides. Interestingly, China which had given a fresh breath to Mugabe in terms of investment and had contributed to Zimbabwean economy remains silent on the situation. However, some believe that this 'soft coup' by

¹ Interview of Mr. Zain Rahim, Political Science Student based in Harare.

² <http://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/press-release-sadc-organ-troika-plus-council-chairperson-ministerial-meeting-discusses-political-situation-zimbabwe/>

³ <http://www.africanews.com/2017/11/21/zimbabwe-has-chance-to-experience-genuine-democracy-ex-un-chief/>

⁴ <https://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/zuma-slams-unconstitutional-take-over-of-zim-20171115>

Zimbabwean military was with the consent of Chinese authorities as General Constantino Chiwenga was on his way back from his official visit to China when he was tipped off with the news of Mugabe's attempted coup by dismissing then Vice-President Mnangagwa.⁵ The African Union is of the opinion that the "constitutional legality" be a guiding path in this crises.⁶

The political deadlock has now been brokered with Mugabe's resignation when his impeachment was underway.⁷ Mugabe move of sidelining Vice President Mnangagwa was constitutional as he held this power under the changes made to ZANU-PF constitution.⁸ On the other hand there are forces which favor Mugabe and the youth especially wants to see Ms. Grace in power.⁹ With his resignation, Mr. Mnangagwa has a clear path to Presidency. However, the upcoming general elections in 2018 will mark a watershed moment in Zimbabwean history and if conducted fairly may give Mugabe and his supporters a chance to legitimize their share in electoral politics.

The narrative is changing across the continent except for much of the Central Africa region where leaders are holding on tight after decades. The democratic wave has seen power transitions in most countries, be it from leaders within a party or from ruling party to opposition and back in some instances.¹⁰ It will be interesting to watch the interplay of a mix of both internal and external factors.

What is more important is that Zimbabwe comes out strong and unified as a result of these crises.

The people of Zimbabwe are at a political cross roads where their choice and decision today will have lasting implications on the future course of their country, and 2018 elections will provide them with that opportunity. It is also important that democratic institutions evolve and respect the wishes of people and are abiding of the constitutional law. However, ultimate stability and prosperity lies in better governance, free and fair election under a democratic ethos, welfare of the citizenry and the ability of Zimbabweans of solving their own problems. .

⁵ John Campbell, "Mugabe Holds on", Council of Foreign Relations, November 20, 2017

⁶ https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/33377-pr_statement_by_the_chairperson_of_auc_on_zimbabwe_ff.pdf

⁷ <http://www.africanews.com/2017/11/21/robert-mugabe-resigns-as-president-zimbabwe/>

⁸ <https://mg.co.za/article/2014-11-23-mugabe-boosts-power-with-changes-to-zanu-pf-constitution>

⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/zimbabwe-zanu-pf-youth-wing-ready-die-mugabe-171114133805737.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.africanews.com/2017/11/14/backdoor-exit-african-presidents-forced-out-of-power-1/>