Zimbabwe's "Military-assisted Transition" and Prospects for Recovery

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What's the issue? After Zimbabwe's military intervened to bring an end to 37 years of rule by former President Robert Mugabe, their continued presence as key political players may complicate the new president's already difficult task of reinstituting effective governance, curbing corruption and setting the stage for credible elections in 2018.

Why does it matter? President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his ruling ZANU-PF party must deliver free and fair elections, and speed up economic, electoral and political reforms, in order to establish their legitimacy and win much-needed donor support and debt relief.

What should be done? International actors must press the new president toward reforms, professional and transparent policing, leveling the playing field ahead of the 2018 vote and promoting national reconciliation after past government abuses.

I. Overview

After 37 years in power, Robert Mugabe is no longer Zimbabwe's president. Over the course of eighteen days in November, conflict among factions within the ruling party over then-Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa's bid to succeed the president finally came to a head. The military, intent on preserving interests it felt were threatened by detractors within the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) forced Mugabe to resign; Mnangagwa, who had fled the country fearing assassination, was inaugurated on 24 November. He quickly consolidated power, appointing a cabinet filled with supporters, including military officers and war veterans. For its part, ZANU-PF dutifully silenced and sidelined his rivals, expelling his fiercest critics. For Mnangagwa, now comes the hard part: he must rescue a failing economy, reinstitute effective governance and set the stage for credible elections in 2018.

Both then-Zimbabwe Defence Forces commander, General Constantino Chiwenga and Mnangagwa claimed the military intervention was necessary to preserve the revolution and stabilise the country. Observers described it as a "military-assisted

transition", a fudge widely accepted both inside and outside Zimbabwe to avoid labelling it a coup, which would have triggered continental and international sanctions. It was spearheaded by elements of the security sector fearful of the rising influence within ZANU-PF of individuals threatening their political and economic interests. The overall acquiescence in their actions is understandable: it reflects fatigue with Mugabe and hope among Zimbabweans as well as external parties that the new rulers can reverse the country's calamitous economic decline. Still, the military's involvement sets a worrying precedent, raising questions about the role of opaque power-brokers.

Those concerns have been exacerbated by Mnangagwa's cabinet appointments. ZANU-PF appears intent on buying time to consolidate its position ahead of elections that must be held before September 2018 and that it is determined and well placed to win. There is precedent: after it blatantly rigged the 2008 elections and faced both violence and strong regional and international pressure, the party agreed to share power with the opposition but used the next four years to bolster its hold on power and engineer a huge, albeit highly controversial victory in the 2013 elections. Although Mnangagwa has promised "free and fair" elections, he takes over as an unelected president with a limited timeframe and with a long list of overdue electoral reforms to ensure their credibility. He and his government will need to act fast lest the vote be flawed and fail to deliver the required legitimacy for donors to re-engage and for Zimbabweans to work together on the country's recovery.

The military's actions in Zimbabwe – ousting a president to prevent an outcome inimical to its interests – were far from unique, the most recent example being the Egyptian armed forces' 2011 ouster of then-President Hosni Mubarak. The lesson learned from those precedents is that how President Mnangagwa acts now, and how the international community reacts, matter. In several respects, President Mnangagwa's inaugural speech set a new tone. He focused on economic stimulus, rule of law and responsible governance. What he failed to mention was electoral and security sector reform, national healing, devolution of power and reconciliation. And what he failed to do was reach out to the opposition or ensure the executive was staffed with competent technocrats. The test will be what he does next and how vigilant international actors are in pressing him to head in the right direction, notably by making their support contingent on the holding of credible elections.

The new president has asked for patience. He says he needs time to address the country's multiple challenges. This is a reasonable request. However, to achieve his goals, and cement a legacy as the leader who turned Zimbabwe around, he will have to lay the foundation for institutionalising rule of law, respect for the constitution and – of crucial importance in the run-up to the 2018 vote – implementing procedures that can ensure free and fair elections. The military's return to the barracks and the resumption of normal duties by the Zimbabwe Republic Police after five weeks is an important step. In this spirit, initial actions should include:

- Develop and implement a plan to professionalise policing with sufficient and transparent civilian oversight.
- Fund the requested extension of the comprehensive biometric voter registration process and improved transparency.

- Commit to a national dialogue on the economic reform strategy to be led by an independent committee that would include representatives from the opposition, civil society, the churches and important commercial sectors.
- Promote national reconciliation, notably by addressing past government abuses.

II. An Ignoble End to Africa's Oldest Revolutionary

The back story of Mugabe's dramatic fall is beginning to emerge; more details will seep out in coming weeks and months.[1] What is clear is that Mnangagwa's dismissal and subsequent expulsion from ZANU-PF on 6 November, coupled with moves to change the military command, was the catalyst for military intervention. Efforts by Generation 40 (G40) faction members of ZANU-PF to consolidate their position and Grace Mugabe's elevation to vice president also threatened the positions and interests of key members of the security sector. Indeed, tensions between Mugabe and elements in the security sector had been growing for some time, especially in relation to their – and Mnangagwa's – declining influence in party structures. Since December 2015, Mugabe had twice publicly admonished the military for interfering in internal ZANU-PF politics; Grace Mugabe's public insults and divisiveness poured fuel on the fire. The G40 faction of younger politicians and Mnangagwa detractors presented another challenge, threatening the status quo and related economic interests, said to include control over the Marange diamond fields.[2]

Warned his life was in danger, Mnangagwa fled to Mozambique.[3] From there he reportedly headed to China, where General Chiwenga was on a prearranged visit.[4] Although he claimed on 8 November that he would be back in a matter of weeks, many believed Mnangagwa had acted too late to mount a comeback. ZANU-PF leaders had purged some of his key supporters; provincial party structures, keen to ingratiate themselves with the Mugabes and the G40 leaders, were calling for more expulsions. The chairman of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, Ambassador Chris Mutsvangwa, retreated to South Africa, where he gave media interviews vigorously attacking the Mugabes and the G40 for hijacking the party.[5]

[1] See, for example, "Special Report: 'Treacherous shenanigans' – The inside story of Mugabe's downfall", Reuters, 26 November 2017; "Mugabe dramatic exit: Fresh details emerge", *The Standard* (Harare), 26 November 2017.

[2] Crisis Group correspondence, Zimbabwean diamond sector expert, 28 November 2017.

[3] Mnangagwa claimed he was poisoned at the 12 August ZANU-PF rally. "Mugabe's successor and the 'poisoned ice cream' plot", TimesLive (www.timeslive.co.za), 24 November 2017.

[4] These trips prompted allegations that Mnangagwa worked with Chiwenga, and China supported the military intervention. Mnangagwa said he had remained in regular contact with the service chiefs. "Zimbabwe's Mnangagwa: I was going to be eliminated – BBC News", video, YouTube, 22 November 2017, http://bit.ly/2Biw9KV. China has denied interference. The extent to which Chiwenga and Mnangagwa briefed African and international actors remains unclear. It is noteworthy that none officially called the intervention a coup.

[5] "Sacked Mnangagwa 'holds the light to a new and prosperous Zimbabwe'", news24 (www.news24.com), 9 November 2017.

Before leaving for China on 5 November, Chiwenga was aware of plans to purge him and other senior military officers.[6] His allies then foiled an attempt to arrest him on his return on 12 November. The following day, Chiwenga, flanked by some 90 senior officers, issued a five-page statement from the army's King George VI (since renamed Josiah Tongogara) barracks, warning that ZANU-PF had been infiltrated by counter-revolutionaries intent on destroying the party.[7] It was an unprecedented threat, amounting to a pre-emptive final warning and clear message that they were going to act.[8] The state media was prevented from covering the statement. Forty hours later the officers made their move, announcing on national television that they had been forced to intervene for security reasons.[9]

Over the last seventeen years, key commanders have publicly stated they will not allow someone without liberation movement credentials to take control of the country. This was initially directed at the opposition and had never before been publicly directed at the G40. An unknown number of G40 leaders and their allies in the security sector, reportedly including Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri, were detained, and Mugabe and his wife were confined to their home, purportedly "for security reasons".[10]

[6] A security sector reconfiguration was clearly underway. "Mugoba deployed to African Union", *Zimbabwe Independent*, 3 November 2017. Some say Chiwenga's visit was intended to secure Beijing's support, and was part of broader efforts to ensure regional and international acquiescence to the intervention, as long as it retained a "broadly constitutional" facade. "Zimbabwe: The crocodile snaps back" and "Zimbabwe's week of upheaval", *Africa Confidential*, 17 November 2017.

[7] "General Chiwenga Statement", NewsdzeZimbabwe (www.newsdzezimbabwe.co.uk), 13 November 2017. It echoed Mnangagwa's own belated attempts to push back against the G40 and especially Professor Jonathan Moyo, whom he accused of working for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. "Mnangagwa Dossier on Prof Moyo", video, YouTube, 12 October 2017, http://bit.ly/2CkTUCz. Moyo, a key G40 strategist had made a damning audio-visual presentation to Mugabe and the politburo on 19 July, that accused Mnangagwa of "systematically working towards a criminal and unconstitutional takeover of power" with a network of ZANU-PF officials, as well as with General Chiwenga. "VP Mnangagwa politburo presentation", video, YouTube, 11 August 2017, http://bit.ly/2CkWybt. Allegations against Mnangagwa were reinforced in an article based on leaked intelligence reports that claimed he was plotting a succession that would introduce radical policy changes. "Behind the scenes, Zimbabwe politicians plot post-Mugabe reforms", Reuters, 5 September 2017. The situation rapidly deteriorated from this point as he was publicly derided by senior party and government officials over the next eight weeks.

[8] Crisis Group correspondence, security analyst, 13 November 2017.

[9] In a televised address in the early hours of 15 November, Major General Sibusiso Busi "SB" Moyo told Zimbabweans, "we wish to make this abundantly clear; this is not a military takeover of government. What the Zimbabwe defence forces is doing is to pacify a degenerating political, social and economic situation in our country which if not addressed may result in violent conflict". He insisted: "We are only targeting criminals around him who are committing crimes that are causing social and economic suffering in the country in order to bring them to justice. As soon as we have accomplished our mission we expect that the situation will return to normalcy". "Zimbabwe army full statement: Situation moved to another level", Huffington Post (www.huffingtonpost.co.za), 15 November 2017.

[10] Details on arrests and detentions, as well as lists of wanted persons, with some exceptions have remained sketchy. Home Affairs Minister Ignatius Chombo and ZANU-PF youth league leaders, including its chairperson, Kudzai Chipanga, were arraigned after being held incommunicado in military custody for a week. Accountability will be selective. Mugabe has been granted immunity from prosecution. It is unclear whether this has been extended to his wife. Some G40 leaders, including Saviour Kasukuwere and Johnathan Moyo, were allegedly allowed to leave the country as part of a

The military were at pains to ensure a legal and constitutional veneer for their intervention given that a coup remains a red line for both the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU), and would have resulted in sanctions, as well as sinking prospects for donor support. The military and its co-conspirators therefore needed Mugabe's acquiescence, which was his final bargaining chip. He refused to step down and a standoff ensued as he attempted to cling to power as well as obtain guarantees for his family and key G40 members.

However, Mugabe's position was made increasingly untenable by unprecedented mass demonstrations on 18 November calling for him to step down. On 19 November, ZANU-PF's Central Committee dismissed Mugabe as party leader, and replaced him with the reinstated Mnangagwa. It also expelled Grace Mugabe and senior G40 leaders from the party, and reinstated membership for all those subjected to disciplinary measures since 2014. The president was given until midday on 20 November to resign or face impeachment.

Mugabe addressed the nation on the night of 19 November. Flanked by security chiefs, he began by acknowledging the gravity of the situation, affirmed the army's intervention was well intentioned and not illegal. Then, to widespread disbelief and anger, he failed to resign.

On the morning of 20 November, the war veterans' leadership and street demonstrators demanded the president's impeachment. Chiwenga called for patience, pointing out that Mugabe was in communication with Mnangagwa, who would be returning to Zimbabwe shortly. There was no mention of resignation. It was a tangible step-back that reflected the military's desire for a political conclusion to the crisis.

That afternoon, preparations for the impeachment process got underway and Mnangagwa released his first statement in ten days, calling for Mugabe to step aside. He affirmed the military's intervention, "Operation Restore Legacy", was intended to preserve "the ethos of our struggle against British colonialism", that the impeachment process must now take its course and that he would return when "the right conditions for security and stability prevail".[11]

On the morning of 21 November, Mugabe tried to call his remaining cabinet members together but only a handful turned up. Impeachment proceedings moved ahead, co-sponsored by both ZANU-PF and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T). The charge sheet was an embarrassing litany of failures attributed to Mugabe. Conscious that the game was up, the president tendered his resignation letter, which had reportedly been written several days earlier. Zimbabweans spilled out into the streets in droves to celebrate his departure. The scene was set for Mnangagwa's triumphant return.

deal negotiated with Mugabe. Crisis Group correspondence, security expert, 5 December 2017. "Zimbabwe – A martial mind-set", *Africa Confidential*, 15 December 2017.

[11] "Mnangagwa's full statement", *Daily News*, 21 November 2017.

III. The King Is Dead, Long Live the King

A. *Mnangagwa – Old Wine in Old Bottles?*

Presented as a pragmatist, Emmerson Mnangagwa was unable to deliver needed reforms when he was vice president (2014-2017) under Mugabe. Whether he can succeed now remains in question. He has been accused of responsibility both individually and as part of ZANU-PF's collective leadership for an array of human rights violations, ranging from the Gukurahundi massacres in the 1980s,[12] Operation Murambatsvina (Move the Rubbish) that violently cleared slums across the country in 2005, and the election violence of 2008 that left over 300 dead.[13] He has denied any role in these abuses.[14]

Mnangagwa also was named in a UN inquiry into the illegal exploitation of natural resources during Zimbabwe's intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the late 1990s. Members of the security apparatus and military personnel have been accused of benefitting from the control of diamond fields in Marange.[15] Although Mnangagwa has committed to cleaning out corruption,[16] there is little confidence this would include investigations into revenues allegedly missing from Marange.

Will Mnangagwa's past pollute his future? His inaugural presidential speech was promising, widely welcomed as a significant shift. Gone was the anti-imperialist rhetoric and finger-pointing that characterised Mugabe's rule. Instead the new president recognised the "poisoned, rancorous and polarising" nature of domestic politics and called for a national response to the multiple challenges facing the country. He expressed a desire to reach across political, ethnic and racial lines, calling for a renewal of the republic and the strengthening of its democracy. He promised to address land tenure and compensation for past seizures, tackle the country's ongoing economic decline (now manifesting itself in debilitating liquidity shortages and price

[12] "Zimbabwe: Victims of mass 1980s killings still wait for justice", Al Jazeera, 10 December 2017. Mnangagwa has appointed Perence Shiri the military commander of the 5th Brigade, the North Korean trained military unit responsible for many of these killings, as minister of agriculture and lands. For details on Gukurahundi, see "Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980-1988", Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, March 1997.

[13] See Crisis Group Africa Report N°97, *Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina: The Tipping Point?*, 17 August 2005. On the 2008 election violence see Crisis Group Africa Report N°173, *Zimbabwe: The road to reform or another dead end?*, 27 April 2011.

[14] Martin Fletcher, "The last days of Robert Mugabe", *New Statesmen*, 1 January 2017; Max Bearak, "Who is Emmerson Mnangagwa, Mugabe's successor in Zimbabwe?", *The Washington Post*, 22 November 2017.

[15] "Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo", United Nations Security Council S/2002/1146, 16 October 2002. In March 2016, Mugabe acknowledged $13 billion in diamond revenue could not be accounted for. "Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe: foreign companies 'stole diamonds'", BBC, 4 March 2016. See also, "Diamonds: A Good Deal for Zimbabwe? Who Controls Revenues from Marange Diamonds? A case study of Anjin and Mbada companies", Global Witness, February 2012 and "An Inside Job – Zimbabwe: The State, the Security Forces and a Decade of Disappearing Diamonds", Global Witness, September 2017.

[16] "Mnangagwa: Corruption must be rooted out to build strong economy", Eyewitness News, 24 November 2017.

surges)[17], take steps to protect investment, deal with debt obligations, improve trade opportunities, reform the banking sector and improve administrative efficiencies.[18]

But what he did not say was as significant as what he said. He remained silent on electoral and security sector reforms as well as plans to devolve political power, and said little about reconciliation and national healing beyond general platitudes.[19]

In short, while the speech offered some hope that Mnangagwa might chart a new national political course, it is equally possible the country is witnessing nothing more than a reconsolidation of power by ZANU-PF.[20] Party structures and leaders have dutifully followed the new script, in the main quickly turning against Mugabe and the G40. The reconfiguration of leadership and party structures – both national and provincial –will consolidate the position of Mnangagwa and his allies. The truncated December Extraordinary Party Congress endorsed Mnangagwa's (and his top lieutenants) leadership and candidacy for the 2018 elections, as well as the G40 leaders' expulsion.[21] Some party members kicked out during the 2014-2015 purge of former Vice President Joice Mujuru and her allies have indicated their intention to return.[22]

B. *The Security Sector – Putchists or Guardians of the Constitution?*

The loudest cheers at Mnangagwa's inauguration ceremony were reserved for General Chiwenga. This echoed the strong support expressed for the military and Chiwenga during the unprecedented demonstrations on 18 November. The military was conspicuous in the stands of the national stadium during inauguration celebrations. Regarded

[17] Finance and Economic Development Minister Patrick Chinamasa has acknowledged challenges in the 2018 National Budget statement. These include, "indiscipline in the management of public finances", "declining domestic and foreign investor confidence", "policy inconsistencies", and "a major fiscal and monetary policy disconnect". Chinamasa admitted: "Our quest for reversing economic decline … can only become reality if we walk the talk with regard to adoption of a paradigm shift in the way we do business and manage our economy, public enterprises and finances". He committed the country to a raft of measures including "curbing corruption and addressing rampant rent-seeking behaviours". "National Budget Statement 2018: Towards a new economic order", Minister of Finance and Economic Development, 7 December 2018.

[18] "President Mnangagwa's inauguration speech in full", *Chronicle*, 25 November 2017.

[19] While compensation of white farmers who lost their land is welcomed, silence on an array of other matters, including compensation for the hundreds of thousands of farm workers who lost their livelihoods, exposes the confines of his thinking around national healing and rebuilding confidence in government. Civil society activists are calling for inquiries into the Gukurahundi massacres; military abuses during Operation Murambatsvina; security force participation in elections; political violence during the 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 elections; a comprehensive audit of the land allocations; a full investigation into the theft of Marange diamonds; a full investigation into corruption in parastatals; and an audit of all politicians. Crisis Group correspondence, civil society activist, 19 November 2017. Significantly, Zimbabwe's Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) welcomed Mnangagwa's commitments as "critical" for "setting the country on a positive path", but acknowledged the "myriad other human rights challenges that require attention", and specifically highlights the Gukurahundi massacres. ZHRC Statement, Bulawayo, 1 December 2017.

[20] According to Professor Moyo's July politburo presentation Mnangagwa's alleged party network, "resembled a functioning inner state". "Purges: Past, Present, Future", Radar Group, unpublished paper seen by Crisis Group, November 2017.

[21] "Congress endorses ED presidency", *The Herald*, 16 December 2017.

[22] "Former bigwigs eye Zanu PF return", *Daily News*, 5 December 2017.

by many as the power behind Mnangagwa,[23] Chiwenga signalled that the military is now a direct political player, with many anticipating that at some point he will shift from the army to politics. His retirement by President Mnangagwa and pending "redeployment" was confirmed as part of the military leadership reconfiguration announced this week.[24] The military's direct involvement in "guiding" both the ruling party's and the government's new direction makes it difficult to depict the events as a legal defence of the constitution.

Chiwenga's intervention also exposed fault lines in the security sector. Contrary to expectations, he was not challenged by other officers, including those in the presidential guard. Indeed, their loyalty to Mugabe quickly dissipated. Matters differed when it came to the Zimbabwe Republic Police and Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). The military perceived both as supporting the G40.[25] Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri was reportedly placed under house arrest by the military and subsequently brought in to attend Mugabe's 19 November press statement and Mnangagwa's inauguration to ensure developments enjoyed a veneer of legality. He was loudly booed as he sheepishly pledged allegiance to Mnangagwa.[26] In the same vein, the police were withdrawn for almost five weeks from operational duties, but have since returned.[27]

A reconfiguration of power dynamics and reporting lines in the Joint Operations Command (JOC) – the body comprising service chiefs and ministries that provide the backbone to ZANU-PF governance – appears likely.

IV. Elections and the Opposition's Role

A. *Ensuring Fair Elections?*

Following his dismissal, both Mnangagwa and his war veteran allies called for a more inclusive politics. That appeal appears to have been remarkably short-lived. Immediately upon his return, Mnangagwa said that "Zanu-PF will continue ruling no matter what, while those who oppose it will continue barking".[28] Mnangagwa's new administration rewarded key allies in ZANU-PF, brought in more war veterans

[23] "Zimbabwe – A martial mind-set", op. cit.

[24] "Press Statement by the Commander Zimbabwe National Army: Lt General Phillip Valerio Sibanda", 18 December 2017. Although no announcements were made at the December Extraordinary Congress, it is still expected Chiwenga will be appointed one of two second secretaries in ZANU-PF's Presidium and then vice president. This could serve as a stepping stone to the presidency later.

[25] Crisis Group correspondence, security expert, 8 December 2017.

[26] Chihuri as expected retired just a month later. "Press Statement by the Commander Zimbabwe National Army: Lt General Phillip Valerio Sibanda", 18 December 2017.

[27] Images on social media showed police officers under military guard. This was popular given police abuse and corruption. The police force was fully withdrawn from duty for two weeks and then allowed to take part in joint operations for three. In late November, the military and security forces announced the police was resuming its constitutional mandate, starting with joint patrols with the military as the situation had "returned to normalcy". "Joint statement by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces and Security Services of Zimbabwe", 27 November 2017.

[28] "Emmerson Mnangagwa says Zimbabwe witnessing a 'new and unfolding democracy'", video, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 22 November 2017, http://ab.co/2yuhyK1.

and even two senior security service chiefs. It did not include opposition elements or external technocrats as had been expected. Although slightly slimmer in size, its composition reflects a large degree of continuity in substance, with at least a third of the cabinet having served in previous Mugabe administrations. Women and youth are poorly represented.

The forthcoming elections will be a milestone in this regard. Prior to Mugabe's resignation, they were expected to be held in April. Mnangagwa has committed to holding them in 2018, though likely not until July or August. Opinions in Zimbabwe are sharply divided over the merits of these elections: some argue that a vote is critical to establish a clear mandate; others believe that without necessary and prompt electoral reforms, polls will not provide the legitimacy necessary to tackle Zimbabwe's multiple challenges regardless of who wins.[29]

A key question revolves around the credibility of the elections. In his inaugural address, Mnangagwa promised they would be "free and fair" yet was silent on prerequisites to ensure that outcome, namely the electoral reforms called for by the opposition, civil society organisations (CSOs) and international election observers. These include measures to guarantee a credible and verifiable voters roll; the independence and capacity of, as well as parliamentary oversight over, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission; removal of the executive's ability to veto election observers, and "creation of a conducive political environment devoid of violence, intimidation, patronage, propaganda and hate speech with all stakeholders (citizens, political parties, traditional leaders, media, churches, CSOs) abiding by the rules of the electoral conduct".[30]

Should elections be held on schedule, the government will need to take steps to signal a commitment to a fairer electoral playing field. These include expanding the voter registration process, improving transparency of vote data transfer and management of the voters' roll, and curtailing partisan manipulation of national resources. A first test looms: the extent to which ZANU-PF opens political space and shuns coercive and manipulative electoral tactics.[31] The party's past election strategies prevented many eligible voters from participating and facilitated vote manipulation.

Excluding the diaspora, there are potentially more than 7 million voters. How many are verifiably registered will provide a good indication of the new government's intentions.[32] In September, the government introduced an Electoral Reform Bill, but civil society organisations said its scope was "extremely limited … deal[ing] only with

[29] So far, calls from civil society for the establishment of a National Transitional Authority to enact key reforms predicated on a national dialogue ahead of any election have been largely ignored. "Towards a National Transitional Authority (NTA)", Platform for Concerned Citizens, 20 November 2017; "The National People's Convention Declaration", Harare, 24 November 2017.

[30] "Towards credible elections in Zimbabwe – Key asks", press release, The Elections Resources Centre and Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network, 20 November 2017.

[31] The electoral commission is struggling to meet its registration targets and has sensibly left open the door to extend the registration period. A recent court ruling that extends voter registration rights to Zimbabweans who had been designated as "aliens" is a further positive development. "'Aliens' win the right to register as voters", *NewsDay*, 30 November 2017.

[32] The electoral commission set a target of 7.2 million, which was revised down to 5 million when it became evident this was overly ambitious. With two weeks left in the registration period, there have been only 4.3 million registrations and the commission has requested more money to extend the process. "Zimbabwe: ZEC requests $8m for voter registration extension", *The Herald*, 15 December 2017.

a few aspects of voter registration and one related matter. It does not tackle the many other defects in the Electoral Act, which include provisions that are not compliant with the Constitution".[33]

B. *What Role for the Opposition?*

Mugabe's unexpected departure places the opposition in uncharted territory. Before these recent developments, most analysts gave the opposition – unable to exploit the worsening socio-economic conditions or ZANU-PF's debilitating divisions – little chance of winning.[34] Now, it has a new opportunity to find its purpose as well as a convincing course of action.

Prospects are uncertain. At this juncture, the opposition is likely to head into the elections divided and massively outgunned. It is expected to field half a dozen presidential candidates. The main opposition coalition grouping, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, was launched this past August but has struggled to attract many smaller parties and faces acute resource shortages. Furthermore, Tsvangirai's health problems have kindled internal succession struggles.[35] He may not be well enough to lead an election campaign next year.

Had Mnangagwa invited the opposition to participate in the new government, it would have faced a serious dilemma: whether to contribute to his national economic recovery program or concentrate on the 2018 elections. Their exclusion from the new government means they can concentrate on regrouping and preparing for the polls. In particular, acting in concert with civil society, they can play a major role in monitoring and publicly assessing the government's reforms.

Specifically, the opposition should back civil society demands for core electoral reforms. These include:

- drafting and passing a comprehensive electoral law consistent with the 2013 constitution that guarantees the independence of the electoral committee and prevents government interference in election management;
- extending the voter registration process and ensuring there is a transparent and comprehensive verification process to develop a credible voters' roll;
- enhancing the independence of the electoral commission;
- promoting a more conducive political environment to encourage participation and address violations, and;
- allowing more and longer-term voter observation missions.[36]

[33] Election Watch 18/2017, Veritas, 30 October 2017. Civil society identified reform of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, electoral reform, an expanded accreditation of observer missions and continuous biometric voter registration, along with the creation of a conducive political environment as key demands requiring attention by the new administration. "The National People's Convention Declaration", Harare, 24 November 2017.

[34] Crisis Group interviews and correspondence, analysts, September-November 2017.

[35] He was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2016 and receives chemotherapy in South Africa. He returned for more treatment in late November.

[36] "Towards credible elections in Zimbabwe – the Key Asks", press release, Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network. The MDC Alliance's call for an expanded role for the UN in elections is likely to fall on deaf ears. "MDC wants UN-monitored polls", *Daily News*, 28 November 2017.

In addition, the opposition should lobby the government to request an assessment of election conditions by the SADC Electoral Advisory Council and for the deployment of a long-term election observation mission from the Africa Union (AU). Elections should not be held unless and until reforms are in place to ensure they will be credible. The international community should exert its leverage to this end by making clear that until credible elections are held, donors will refrain from allocating significant new long-term funding or supporting debt relief as laid out in the 2015 re-engagement strategy.

V. A Coup or Not a Coup? International Reaction

The military, Mnangagwa and his allies have managed to avoid having their "military-assisted transition" labelled a coup.[37] SADC and the AU carefully avoided the term.[38] Mugabe had called for SADC's intervention, and the regional body dispatched envoys from South Africa. The matter subsequently was elevated to an emergency meeting of the heads of state belonging to SADC's Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, which scheduled a joint visit by SADC chair, South Africa President Jacob Zuma, and the chair of the Organ, Angola President João Lourenço. But the visit was cancelled following Mugabe's resignation.

Western nations, China, Russia and the global south in general also tempered their reaction and avoided condemning the military intervention. Most, even long-term allies, were keen to see Mugabe depart, though they would have preferred a legal and legitimate process. An assessment of what this transition means for Zimbabwe's democratic project and institutions largely has been avoided.[39]

For Zimbabweans and outside actors, the turning of the Mugabe page offers a genuine opportunity for economic recovery. Mnangagwa clearly intended to capitalise on the sentiment: his inaugural speech made clear his intent to re-engage with international donors and Western companies.

[37] "Pastoral Statement of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference Following the Military Assisted Transition of November 2017", 21 November 2017. Notwithstanding Mnangagwa's own admission that he remained in constant contact with security chiefs while outside the country, the military's intervention has been masked by the party and parliamentary processes that resulted in Mugabe's resignation. In a final act of legal theatre, on inauguration day, High Court Justice George Chiweshe – a long-time Mnangagwa ally – handed down two judgments nullifying the vice president's 6 November dismissal and pronouncing the military intervention and takeover constitutional. Such judicial flexibility raises concerns about the prospect of meaningful change. Tichatonga Mangwana, "Has the Mnangagwa administration had a false start in respect to the rule of law?", Nehanda Radio (http://nehandaradio.com), 27 November 2017. These judgements are likely to be appealed.

[38] The closest these organisations came was when the current head of the AU, Guinean President Alpha Condé, said in an interview that the military intervention "seems like a coup" and urged the military to restore constitutional order. "African Union says Zimbabwe crisis 'seems like coup'", Agence France-Presse (AFP), 15 November 2017.

[39] The UK, the most important Western power in Zimbabwe, has played the primary role in promoting re-engagement. Its minister of state for Africa, Rory Stewart, was in Harare to make his own assessment before Mnangagwa's inauguration. The British back Mnangagwa as the most realistic option for Zimbabwe's recovery, a controversial position that has gained international traction.

There is no quick fix for Zimbabwe's array of economic challenges. Investors also are keen to explore options, but much work is needed to resuscitate and expand on the 2015 Lima Re-Engagement Strategy (developed with the international financial institutions and other creditors) that sets out a path for repayment of debt arrears, reform and access to new lines of credit. The government also must cut expenditure, which means downsizing the civil service, the last significant source of employment in the formal sector. The government likely will not receive budgetary support, as most international players will want to see tangible progress on a range of fronts before considering this kind of assistance.

Nor is there any obvious or immediate palliative to the country's liquidity crisis and massive inflationary pressures.[40] The kind of support international actors can provide in these areas will become clearer only when the government provides policy direction. When that time comes, it will be important for donors to coordinate their actions.[41]

VI. Conclusion

Robert Mugabe's exit provides ZANU-PF's new leaders with an unprecedented opportunity to halt and possibly reverse Zimbabwe's precipitous two-decade-long slide and forge a path to sustainable economic and political recovery. But this is at best a mixed blessing. The military's pivotal role in forcing Mugabe out and their continuing presence as key political players, while welcomed in some quarters, presents a troubling precedent as well as a major challenge to the rule of law and constitutional order. Given their deep financial interests, members of the security forces are likely to continue playing a role in the country's economy, which could have consequences on broader issues of governance, especially efforts to curb corruption and create a rules-based business environment. By the same token, the military's and ZANU-PF's desire to retain power will have implications for the country's future political course.

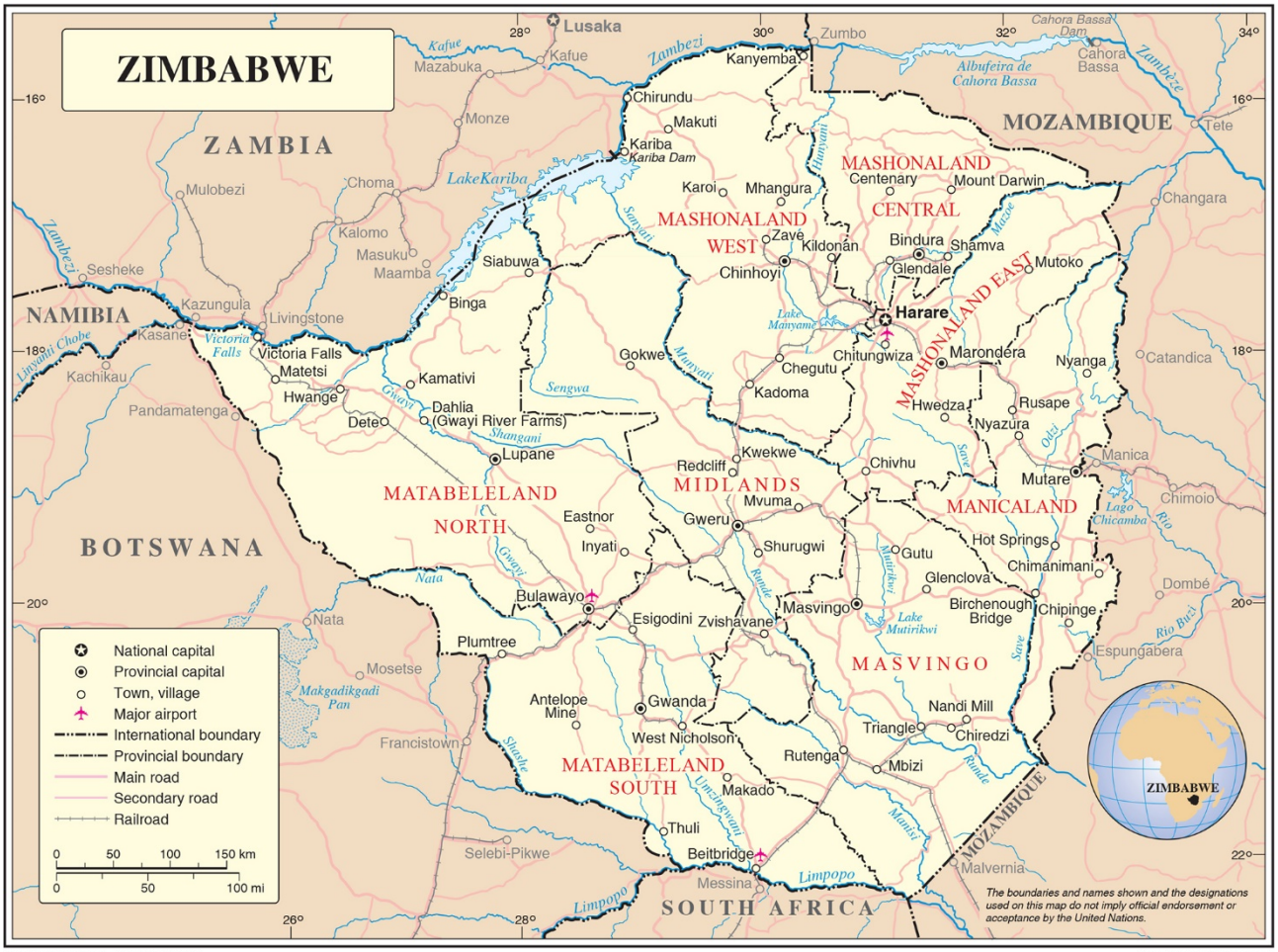
Early steps provide reasons to fear that Mnangagwa will prioritise managing ZANU-PF and protecting the military's political and economic interests over good governance and democratic consolidation. That would be an important opportunity squandered, and a bad omen for Zimbabwe's future.

Johannesburg/Brussels, 20 December 2017

[40] "Zim inflation widens as military intervenes", fin24, 16 November 2017.

[41] The 2015 reform and re-engagement process was a largely exclusive, even secretive, affair. The "Lima Strategy Document", the government's primary plan for clearing its arrears, was made public only after it was leaked in February 2016. It provided little detail and it remains unclear what, if anything, was subsequently agreed with creditors. Crisis Group Commentary, "Zimbabwe's Threadbare Theatre of Reform", 29 July 2016; "Zimbabwe's Reforms: An Exercise in Credibility or Pretence?", Institute for Security Studies, 7 September 2016.

Appendix A: Map of Zimbabwe



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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