

Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics

Zimbabwe: Regional Politics and Dynamics

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Subject: History and Politics, World Politics Online Publication Date: Mar 2019

DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.873

Summary and Keywords

The persistent and changing forms of military interventions in global politics present continuing challenges for democratic agendas. Authoritarian regimes in Africa bolstered by militarist structures limit the possibilities for democratic alternatives. This can lead to desperate hopes that some form of militarism is a necessary prerequisite for democratic transition sometimes with the assistance of a popular sense of appeal. The outcome of such interventions is often a prelude to yet another round of authoritarian politics. In countries like Zimbabwe embedded in a Southern African region with a history of armed liberation struggles the narratives of a liberating militarism remain strong, as does the official ownership of the liberation narratives and the purported trajectory they should follow. However as these liberation parties face growing challenges from opposition voices that contest for their own claims on liberation histories, divisions and factions within the dominant parties have increased. The future of these struggles remains uncertain but there is a growing danger that a global preference for any form of political stabilization will marginalize the more difficult challenges of developing democratic alternatives.

Keywords: Militarism, constitutionalism, elections, opposition politics, re-engagement, liberation movements, African Politics, Zimbabwe, Mugabe

Introduction

November 2017 witnessed tumultuous events in Zimbabwean politics. On November 6, after months of factional struggles between the Lacoste faction led by then Vice President Emerson Mnangagwa, also nicknamed the crocodile, and the Generation 40 (G40) faction around President Robert Mugabe and his wife Grace, Mugabe fired Mnangagwa. This followed Mugabe's warning to Mnangagwa two days before, when Grace Mugabe was booed at a rally in Bulawayo. The President's wife threatened the embattled Vice President with the call that the "snake must be hit on the head." This was the First Lady's

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decisive move in her bid for the Vice Presidency at the upcoming Zanu PF congress in December 2017.

This most recent factional struggle in Zanu PF followed a long history of violent internal battles within the party, from the years of the liberation struggle in the 1970s, around ethnic and ideological questions. A few years prior to his own party exile, Mnangagwa played a central role in the removal of the previous Vice President, Joyce Mujuru, the wife of a key liberation commander, Solomon Mujuru. As Miles Tendi has demonstrated, Mnangagwa, in support of the Mugabes, and with the central involvement of Army Chief Constantino Chiwenga and the machinery of the military intelligence, conspired in the ousting of Mujuru. This event took place after a long factional struggle between the Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions that began in the 1990s (Tendi, 2016). Thus, both the Mugabes' succession plan and Mnangagwa's long-held presidential ambitions were in play for some time. While at certain times these agendas coincided in their strategic intent, a final confrontation between the two was always on the cards.

The firing of Mnangagwa from the Vice Presidency and his expulsion from Zanu PF, however, had vastly different effects on the Zimbabwean polity. While Joyce Mujuru's dismissal and the expulsion of several of her allies caused some disturbance in the ruling party, it was nothing like the turbulence that followed Mnangagwa's removal and the attempted arrest of the Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, General Chiwenga. The statement justifying this decision accused the former Vice President of persistently exhibiting "disloyalty, disrespect, deceitfulness and unreliability," and that he had behaved in a manner "inconsistent with his official duties" (Moyo, 2017A).

In response Mnangagwa, who fled the country soon after his removal from government, accused Mugabe of allowing the ruling party to be "hijacked by novices and external forces" with a track record of "treachery." In a manner that gave a clear indication of the intervention that would follow, Mnangagwa warned Mugabe:

I will go nowhere. I will fight tooth and nail against those making a mockery against Zanu PF founding principles. You and your cohorts will instead leave Zanu PF by the will of the people and this we will do in the coming weeks.

(Mnangagwa, 2017)

The conditions that provided the context for the November coup can be located in the broader context of Zimbabwe's postcolonial history. Robert Mugabe and his party, Zanu PF, came to power on the back of a long liberation struggle in which the military were always central to the power structures in the party (Kriger, 1992). In the first decade of Zimbabwean independence the language of racial and political reconciliation and international reengagement was already marked by the brutality of military intervention. The Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland in the early 1980s clearly established the Zanu PF agenda of intolerance towards the competing liberation party in the country, ZAPU, and its armed wing ZIPRA. Moreover, this was carried out with the complicity of Western political players in the context of Cold War politics and the strategic objective of

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keeping the new party of liberation in Zimbabwe close to Western interests (Cameron, 2017; Doran, 2017). It also established a precedent for political intolerance towards future political opposition to Zanu PF.

The 1990s and beyond would prove the real test of Zanu PF's capacity to deal both with a stronger political opposition and the growing tensions within the ruling party itself. The Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) that was adopted by Zanu PF in 1990 resulted in the rapid deterioration of the living conditions of the majority of Zimbabweans. Added to this, Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in the DRC in the mid-1990s and Mugabe's agreeing to the demands of war veterans for greater payouts contributed to a massive and rapid escalation of the economic and political crisis (Bond & Manyanya, 2003).

In response to this growing crisis, new social and political movements emerged to challenge the dominance of the ruling party. From the mid-1990s the labor movement, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), which had grown in strength and political autonomy since the mid-1980s, led a new national political debate on the need for both economic and political reform. While providing a critique of the government's neoliberal economic policies the ZCTU also played a key role in the struggle for a new constitution. (McCandless, 2011; Raftopoulos & Sachikonye, 2001). In 1998, in alliance with other forces in civil society, the ZCTU formed the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a movement calling for a constitutional reform in Zimbabwe. Between 1998 and 2000 the NCA led the debate for a new constitution, and the combination of trade union strikes and other labor interventions with advocacy around constitutional reform led to the formation of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in 1999.

In 2000 Zanu PF was defeated in a national referendum that attempted to foist a party-led constitution-making process on the citizenry. This was the first serious political defeat of the ruling party and it triggered a major political intervention by Zanu PF on the land question, resulting in the tumultuous events that became known as the Fast Track Land Reform Process. The violent and repressive politics that accompanied the land seizures, and the accumulated national and international pressures that it placed on the Zimbabwean state, greatly affected opposition and electoral politics after 2000. (Hammar, Raftopoulos, & Jensen, 2003; Moyo & Yeros, 2005; Rutherford, 2018; Scoones et al., 2010).

Elections in 2000, 2002, and most emphatically in 2008, were marked by widespread violence and charges of electoral fraud by the opposition. In the 2008 election, Mugabe was defeated for the first time in a presidential election by rival MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai, but after withholding the announcement of the elections results for almost a month, the Zimbabwean Election Commission announced that although Tsvangirai won the election he did not received the necessary 50 percent plus 1 to be declared the winner. The result was a presidential runoff election which was marred by such widespread violence that Tsvangirai pulled out of the race and Mugabe was declared the winner. However the violence that accompanied Mugabe's "victory" was such that even

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the usually compliant Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) refused to recognize the outcome. Instead SADC led a mediation process that resulted in a Government of National Unity from 2009 to 2013, During this period Zanu PF continued to control the security apparatus in the country and it used the interregnum to consolidate its power (Aeby, 2017; Raftopoulos, 2013).

The military kept Mugabe in power in the electoral violence of 2008; a reminder that Zanu PF would not accept any democratic outcome that resulted in its defeat. However, as David Moore writes, the 2008 intervention was successor to at least three failed earlier attempts involving the military, in 2002, 2004, and 2007, in which moves were initiated to change the Mugabe leadership of Zanu PF (Moore, 2018). These attempts were made as a result of the growing succession battle within the ruling party that would culminate in the November 2017 event.

The November Coup

Soon after Mnangagwa's exit statement, it became clear that this was no idle threat. On November 13, the Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, Constantine Chiwenga, sent out an ultimatum at a press conference surrounded by ninety senior officers. The armed forces, he promised, as the major "stockholders" of the liberation struggle, would take corrective measures against counter-revolutionaries threatening to destroy Zanu PF from within. This was a clear reference to Grace Mugabe and the G40 grouping around her. Chiwenga carefully cast his intervention in the language of constitutionalism, stating:

Let us begin by quoting the Constitution of this Country particularly the preamble which speaks of "Exalting and extolling the brave men and women who sacrificed their lives during the Chimurenga/ Umvukela and compatriots who toiled for the progress of our country".

(Chiwenga, 2017)

Continuing in the language of constitutionalism, Chiwenga quoted Section 212 of the Constitution, which, he argued, mandated the Zimbabwe Defence Forces to protect "its people, its national security and interests and its territorial integrity and to uphold this Constitution." Finally, Chiwenga warned that even though Mugabe remained the Commander in Chief and Head of State of Zimbabwe, the armed forces would protect "our legacy" and that "those bent on high-jacking the revolution will not be allowed to do so"(Chiwenga, 2017). This stress on "constitutionalism" drew on Zanu PF's long history of the selective use of the law and its language in the party's attempt to legitimize repressive political interventions. It also appealed to the long-term importance of the practice and idea of law, and the political imaginary built around making claims against a rule-bound state amongst Zimbabweans, even in the face of a highly politicized judiciary (Veheul, 2016).

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In response, Zanu PF'S National Secretary for Information and Publicity labeled Chiwenga's statement "an outrageous violation of professional soldiership" that suggested "treasonable conduct." Moreover he reaffirmed the official position of the ruling party, which asserted the "primacy of politics over the gun." (Moyo, 2017B). This position was in turn affirmed by the Zanu PF Youth League.

On November 15, Chiwenga's statement of intent was followed by the military takeover of the country's broadcasting service. An announcement by Major General Sibusiso Moyo stated that the military was stepping into the Zimbabwean political fray, in order to "pacify a degenerating political, social and economic situation." The position of both Chiwenga and Moyo was reiterated by the mediation team that negotiated Mugabe's exit. In its report the team wrote that the military operation was not a "military takeover" of the government nor a "challenge to the Head of State" but instead was "meant to prop the authority of the President and buttress his constitutional roles." The report further noted, in an admission of the deeply embedded nature of the military in Zimbabwean politics, that:

Feedback from over 2000 Commissars comprising retired senior officers from the Army already embedded in communities across the country pointed to worrisome, widespread disaffection and malaise within the party, against its leadership, its direction and management style.

(Mukonori, Charamba, & Nhepera, 2017, p. 8)

While the Zanu PF spokesperson and Secretary for the Youth League immediately denounced Chiwenga's statement as an attempt to subvert the Constitution, the military were careful not to cast their intervention as a coup. Major General Moyo, repeating the positions of both Mnangagwa and Chiwenga, described the army's actions as targeting criminals around Mugabe who were causing suffering in the country. Moreover, he assured the country that Mugabe and his family were safe and that as soon as their mission was accomplished the country would return to "normality" (Herald, 2017A).

The intervention by the military was named "Operation Restore the Legacy" but in reality it was a coup in favor of the Mnangagwa faction against their G40 opponents in Zanu PF. As in other cases, such military interventions are based, as Mabee and Vucetic observe, on the concept of exception, in which the political and legal constitution of sovereignty are subjected to "the suspension of regular legislative and judicial rules and procedures, via unified civil society support, for the purposes of dealing with enemies and security threats." (Mabee & Vucetic, 2018, pp. 100-101). Notwithstanding the particular nuances of the military intervention in Zimbabwean politics in November 2017 this characterization also applies to the Zimbabwean case.

In early 2018 the defeated G40 group came together under a different formation called the New Patriotic Front. In a statement on the military intervention the group asserted:

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The military coup was factional and political as it entirely was about Zanu PF politics with no public or national security interests. As such, the military coup was illegal and unconstitutional and specifically violated sections 2, 208, 209, 211, 212, 213 and 124 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

(New Patriotic Front, 2018A, pp. 15–16)

This position was bolstered by the support of former President Mugabe. In his first statement since the coup he declared his position on the November 2017 events to the Chair of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat. He stated that he was pressured into resignation by the army and he was saddened that since November 15, 2017 the institutions of government and state “have been taken over by the military which is now part of the current unconstitutional administration.” Mugabe also expressed his skepticism at the possibility of free and fair elections in 2018, given that the military were in charge, and called on the African Union “to assist to bring this country to normalcy and democracy,” (Zimbabwe Independent, 2018A), a petition previously put to both the SADC and the AU by the NPF (New Patriotic Front, 2018A, p. 24). On March 6, 2018, the NPF formally announced its presence as a political party and its intention to contest the 2018 elections (Mutinhiri, 2018, p. 1). This announcement was preceded by a letter of resignation from Zanu PF of the President of the NPF, Retired Brigadier General Ambrose Mutinhiri, in which he expressed his concern over the coup and the fact that Zanu PF had been “hijacked by fascist elements.” In this, he reversed the official liberation mantra that “politics must always lead the gun.” (Mutinhiri, 2018, p. 2). After a visit from Mutinhiri, one day before the NPF formally announced its presence as a political party, Mugabe formally endorsed both the former and the NPF, extolling the need for men and women of principle to “preserve the legacy of the liberation struggle” (New Patriotic Front, 2018B).

However, the military were fully aware that neither SADC nor the African Union would recognize a new regime brought in through such means. Thus Mnangagwa and his supporters in the Zimbabwe Defence Force opted for a carefully choreographed three-pronged strategy. Firstly as mentioned above, they avoided any reference to a coup d'état and continued to acknowledge that Mugabe remained the Commander in Chief of the armed forces. The “lawfulness” of the military intervention was granted in the High Court on November 24, 2017, by George Chiweshe, the Judge President of the Zimbabwean High Court, and Retired Brigadier General of the Zimbabwe National Army. Secondly, the “Mugabe must go” march organized by the War Veterans on November 18 was devised to provide popular support for the military’s action. The organizers, centered around the war veterans, counted on the accumulated resentment felt toward the Mugabe regime amongst the Zimbabwean citizenry, and their calculation was correct. The thousands that turned out for the march celebrated in a carnival of cathartic joy and unified release, manifested in a temporary romance between the armed forces and the citizenry. This was a case of presenting a coercive force in the guise of popular consent to build a temporary hegemonic frame. Thirdly, in order to provide the constitutional veneer for the military intervention, the Zanu PF Central Committee met on November 19 and made several

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decisions. It expressed gratitude to the military for its intervention in the internal affairs of the party, with a view to bringing normalcy to the party and government.

More decisively the Central Committee expelled twenty members of the G40 faction from the party and removed Robert Mugabe from his position as President and First Secretary of the ruling party, also recommending that he resign as State President. Grace Mugabe was also relieved of her post as Secretary for the Women's League, and Vice President Philekizela Mphoko removed from his post. The party then elected Emmerson Mnangagwa as the new interim President of Zanu PF and nominated him to fill the vacancy of State President. The Central Committee also reinstated membership to all those who had been subjected to disciplinary measures since 2014, and recommended that War Veterans be placed in "strategic positions within the Party and Government on the basis of merit" (Moyo, 2018, p. 3). One day before this Central Committee meeting, the Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army, Lt. General Valerio Sibanda, announced the end of Operation Restore the Legacy, stating that "a new political dispensation has been ushered in to take Zimbabwe into its rightful place within the SADC and the world at large" (Sibanda, 2017).

It was the hope that this strategy would force Mugabe to resign voluntarily, before which he would appoint Mnangagwa as Vice President and thus ease the path for his successor. However in a public address to the nation on the evening after the central committee meeting Mugabe took no such position. Instead he made a somewhat surreal speech assuming he was still in charge. He stated that the military intervention was not a challenge to his command as President and Commander in Chief. Moreover he would preside over the December Party Congress to deal with the issues that had been raised by the military and "return to the guiding principles of our struggle" (Mugabe, 2017A).

This forced the Mnangagwa group to proceed with their next course of action, namely the impeachment of Robert Mugabe. Following the decision of the Zanu PF Parliamentary Caucus to initiate impeachment proceedings on November 20, the process was put in motion in parliament on November 21. Amongst other charges Mugabe was accused of allowing his wife to "usurp Government functions" and "state resources," as well as ignoring all "allegations of corruption and misappropriation of public funds." Mugabe was also charged with the inability to perform the functions of the office "because of physical or mental incapacity." (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2017). On the same day, Mugabe sent in his resignation letter to the Speaker of the House of Assembly. In the letter Mugabe wrote that his decision to resign was "voluntary" and arose from his concern for the welfare of the people of Zimbabwe and his "desire to pursue a smooth, peaceful, and non-violent transfer of power" (Mugabe, 2017B). The resignation was greeted with another round of national celebrations. On November 24, Emmerson Mnangagwa was inaugurated as Zimbabwe's new President.

The Military in Zimbabwean Politics

The irony of these developments is that both factions in this internecine struggle within Zanu PF had been at pains to deploy the language of constitutionalism while in the past they had all worked to undermine the constitutional rights of the Zimbabwean citizenry. For most analysts the Zimbabwean military were central to Mugabe's authoritarian rule, playing a key role in preventing a constitutional change of government through elections for most of the 2000s, including the "silent military coup" of the electoral violence around the 2008 elections in which opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai won the presidential election but was denied the right to take up state power by the military (Raftopoulos & Eppel, 2008). It has carried out mass violations of human rights and been responsible for mass atrocities such as the Gukurahundi massacres in the mid-1980s (Doran, 2017). The liberation war legacy and the role of the war veterans have been at the heart of Zanu PF's legitimizing national discourse throughout the postcolonial period, even if there have been ongoing internal conflicts between the veterans and the political leadership (Kriger, 2003).

Since the emergence of the political opposition in the 2000s the war veterans have remained in the party's coercive structures (Sorensen, 2010), while military personnel have been systematically placed in key positions in the media, electoral structures, the judiciary and the legislature (Raftopoulos, 2013; Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, 2017). By the mid-2000s it was apparent that the Joint Operations Command controlled by Mugabe and the security chiefs, which had originally operated "under the tacit management of the party," had become "an alternative to the state, and was, in effect, a parallel government" (Chitiyo, 2009, p. 8). For Mandaza (2015) this amounted to the emergence of a "securocrat state," while for Bratton and Masunungure the Zimbabwean state was characterized as a "militarised form of electoral authoritarianism" (2008, p. 42), a conceptualization based on the work of Levitsky and Way (2002) and Schedler (2006). Moreover, the military have benefitted greatly from the patronage network in Zanu PF, occupying key areas in agriculture, mining, finance, transport, energy, and the parastatal sectors (Moyo, 2016), resulting in a "predatory" anti-developmental state (Shumba, 2018).

Thus, while the generals have for a long time made it clear that they are the arbiters of rule in Zimbabwean politics, one scholar in particular has differed in his assessment of the dominant role of the military in Zimbabwe politics. Blessing-Miles Tendi, whose work stands out in the analysis of the history and politics of Zimbabwe's military, has argued that the country has not been as unified as the above scholarship has characterized it. Tendi presents a more complicated picture of growing tension between different sections of the security sector, namely between the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and Military Intelligence. With the growing factional battle in Zanu PF between then Vice President Joyce Mujuru and Emmerson Mnangagwa, Mugabe relied increasingly on military intelligence to remove Mujuru as a possible contender for the presidency. The result of this positioning was the increased influence of this division of the security sector on the presidency, and with this the strengthening of the alliance between presidential

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contender Mnangagwa and the commander of the armed forces, General Constantino Chiwenga (Tendi, 2016).

Tendi further argues that it was clear that for much of the postcolonial period Mugabe retained control of the military elites through a combination of his position as Commander in Chief, his position at the pinnacle of the nationalist hierarchy, the use of patronage and the commitment of key sections of the military to the liberation legacy and ideology of Zanu PF. This political control was eventually challenged in November 2017 once it was clear that the future of key sections of the military elite was under threat.

Given this development Tendi may well have overstated his case regarding Mugabe's political control of the military. The state-party cohesion which was once thought to be a central characteristic of ruling-party politics in Zimbabwe (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 77) became much more fractured. In the face of serious fiscal constraints, with its consequent reduction in patronage resources, contestation over the legacy of the liberation struggle within Zanu PF itself, and a weakening of the party structures, this cohesion was seriously fractured in the context of the November coup.

There are still questions as to why Mugabe lost faith in key sections of the military that had kept him in power for nearly four decades, and why he then lost control of the military. By 2016 key sections of the war veterans movement had openly criticized what they characterized as systematic dictatorial tendencies in Mugabe's leadership and the G40 group around him. Thus, for those who were opposed to Mugabe's leadership the central political battle was about "taking back" Zanu PF from those elements who were thought to have desecrated the memory of the party and the liberation ideals. In a document entitled "Blue Ocean - Taking Back Zanu PF" a broad strategy was outlined in which it was stated that "it is imperative that action be taken now to prevent any further damage to the Presidential ambitions of VP Mnangagwa" (Blue Ocean Document, n.d.).¹ There was also a report that the Mnangagwa military intervention was a pre-emptive response to a G40 plan to "capture key state organs," divide the securocrats by roping in people in the police and CIO, "with a view of forming a military buffer for the old man." This move would then lead to the installation of Grace Mugabe and the G40 group at the December 2017 Zanu PF Congress (Daily News, 2018B). From the Mnangagwa camp's point of view this represented a serious attack on "inter-Agency cohesion" within the National Security Establishment, leading to the virtual collapse of the National Joint Operations Command (JOC) (Mukonori et al., 2017, p. 17).

In the present context, the dominance of the military in Zimbabwean politics is clearer and more decisive than ever. This is evidenced by the appointment of military personnel to key positions in government by President Mnangagwa. On December 18, retired Air Chief Marshall Perence Shiri was appointed to the post of Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Development, retired Lt. General Sibusiso Moyo to be Minister Of Foreign Affairs, while retired Major General Engelbert Rugeje became Zanu PF's Political Commissar. Most significantly, the retired Commander of the Defence Forces, Constantino Chiwenga, was appointed the Vice President of Zimbabwe. In accordance

with the Unity Accord signed in 1987 a Second Vice President from Zanu PF's junior partner in government, the other liberation party, ZAPU, was also appointed: Kembo Mohadi, a war veteran.

SADC, the AU and International Players

In the first stage of these developments both SADC and the AU reaffirmed their commitment to SADC's Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections as they relate to the unconstitutional removal of democratically elected governments, and the AU Constitutive Act (SADC, 2017A). The SADC Organ Troika, which met on November 16, then recommended an urgent Extraordinary SADC Summit on Zimbabwe, which summit in turn recommended that the Presidents of South Africa and Angola should undertake a mission to Zimbabwe on November 22 to assess the situation. This intended mission never took place as it was overtaken by the processes leading to the resignation of Mugabe. Soon after the events, SADC responded positively to Mugabe's resignation hailing the "discipline and peacefulness of the people of Zimbabwe" (Herald, 2017B).

Despite the SADC official commitment to constitutionality, it can be argued the South African government in particular, since the time of Mbeki's mediation, had favored a reformed Zanu PF through the stabilizing force of the military as the preferred option of change in Zimbabwe. It was clear that the Zuma administration was fully briefed on Operation Restore the Legacy as it unfolded. One report noted that Zuma was "thankful that throughout the operation the Zimbabwe Defence Forces Command kept briefing the SADF to a point that the SA Government, through its defence arm, was always aware of what was happening" (Herald, 2017C). It should also be noted that early on in the coup the War Veterans had made it clear to SADC, the AU, and the international community that they would "once more make the supreme sacrifice" to stop the restoration and imposition of Mugabe on "our nation" (Zimbabwe War Veterans Association, n.d.).

The EU and in the U.K. also sent out cautiously optimistic signals to the new regime. After the 2013 election which once again kept Zanu PF in power, the EU was at pains to find a workable means of engagement with the Mugabe regime. This manifested itself through extensive funding to institutional capacity-building and governance in areas such as the judiciary, public finance management, trade facilitation, and ease of doing business. In addition, the EU invested heavily in the funding of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and supported civil society's electoral monitoring and educational activities. (Zimbabwe Independent, 2018B). As it was clear that, apart from the introduction of a biometric voter roll (BVR) process, any other major electoral reforms were unlikely ahead of the 2018 elections, the continuation of Mugabe's presidency would have presented a real challenge for the EU. Some form of reform process without Mugabe provided the EU with a new opening for further engagement, as it did for the British Government. A 2018 statement from the Council of the EU clearly set out its eagerness to engage the Mnangagwa regime:

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The ongoing political transition in Zimbabwe creates high expectations among all Zimbabweans. It can open the way to a full return to the Rule of Law, within the constitutional framework, and under civilian rule, allowing for a preparation of much-needed political and economic reforms.

(European Union, 2018A)

The EU also welcomed the commitment of the authorities to hold elections in line with the constitution and looked forward to an invitation to observe the elections. Finally, the European body committed to supporting the regime “in establishing as soon as possible a constructive re-engagement with the international financial institutions based on a clear and time-bound economic and political reform programme” (European Union, 2018). The U.K. was very quick to respond to the Mnangagwa regime, sending an envoy to the inauguration of the new President in November 2017; in April 2018 it promised that it would strongly support the reentry of Zimbabwe into the Commonwealth, depending on the regime conducting a free and fair election. On several occasions after the coup Mnangagwa had promised such an election and that “observers from across the globe” would be allowed to witness the process in 2018 (Herald, 2018C).

Western countries as well as China and Russia all “tempered their reaction and avoided condemning the military intervention” because of an international consensus that Mugabe needed to be replaced (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 11). Given that General Chiwenga was in China just before the coup, as well as the close and long-time relationship between the Chinese and Zimbabwean militaries, it is reasonable to assume that the Chinese government may have had prior knowledge of the military intervention. In March 2018 the U.S. position on Zimbabwe also changed in response to the November events. A Senate Bill was introduced to amend the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Reconstruction Act (ZDERA), which was passed in 2001 in response to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and the human rights violations that accompanied the politics of that period. The new Bill clearly set out the preconditions for the lifting of the targeted measures against the Zanu PF regime; these related in particular to electoral reforms for the 2018 elections. More particularly, the Bill stipulated the need for reforms in the following areas: the release of a biometric voter registration roll in both paper and digital form that would be endorsed by all registered political parties; an independent electoral management body nominated by the political parties represented in the parliament of Zimbabwe; that the Defence Forces stay out of the electoral process as mandated by the Zimbabwe Constitution and remain non-partisan in the process; international observers from the US, AU, SADC and the EU be permitted to observe the entire electoral process preceding, on and following the voting day; candidates be allowed free, full, and equal access to the state media; and civil society groups be allowed to carry out voter and civic education and to monitor the entire electoral process (United States Senate, 2018). These conditions largely followed the recommendations made by MDC Alliance member, Tendai Biti’s, testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa in December

2017 (Biti, 2017), which in turn merely reiterated demands from the political and civic opposition since the early 2000s.

The New Narrative of the Mnangagwa Regime

The economy remained in a deep crisis characterized by low levels of production, de-industrialization and massive informalization of livelihoods. Public expenditures had also been on the rise in the face of shrinking revenues and high levels of debt. A monetary shortage and dominant levels of electronic money use fueled high levels of speculative activity in the money market. The unsustainability of this set of production relations was clear to all the major players.

In his first presidential address Mnangagwa pledged that his administration would carry out various economic stabilization measures including promoting a market economy, ensuring the safety of foreign investment, and compensation for white farmers who lost their land in the Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme, within the terms provided by the Constitution. Mnangagwa also stressed the importance of unity and reviving the economy. He implored all party cadres to “now think, sleep, dream and walk productivity.” He further warned his party that:

We will not be able to accomplish much for as long as our sense of party work remains hidebound in the template of looking at Zanu PF as about politics, politics, politics. No more! Its politics and economics! Let us recognise that the best politics emerge from the marketplace where livelihoods are made. Productivity at all levels must be religiously encouraged

(Herald, 2017D)

Ironically, this discursive emphasis on “unity” and “productivity” harked back to the politics of “reconciliation” and “development” of the 1980s, when Mugabe first came to power and began to consolidate his control over the ruling party and the state (Rich-Dorman, 2016; Raftopoulos & Savage, 2004). Mnangagwa also announced that he had “already begun serious and focussed dialogue with key constituent countries of the West . . . with the objective of normalising our relations.” In an interesting turn, this attempt to depoliticize the position of the state through a more technical discourse around the economy and the desire to reengage the West echoed an earlier attempt at reform by Zanu PF in 2008 led by Simba Makoni. Makoni’s presidential campaign was initially supported by Retired General Solomon Mujuru in an attempt to succeed Mugabe. However as this campaign failed to generate traction, Mujuru withdrew his support (Tendi, 2016, p. 13).

The first budget speech of the new regime laid out the kind of macroeconomic stabilization, neoliberal measures that would assist in reviving the 2015 Lima Re-Engagement Strategy agreed to between the Government of Zimbabwe, the international financial institutions, and other creditors. In his speech the Minister of Finance and

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Economic Development, Patrick Chinamasa, drew attention to the “fiscal indiscipline” and “quasi-fiscal expenditure” of the past. Moreover the fiscal imbalances of the past, financed by Treasury Bills and overdrafts with the Reserve Bank resulted in “destabilising consequences” for the economy. The new government’s economic policy, Chinamasa promised, “will be predicated on creating conditions for an increased production led economic recovery, targeting FDI [foreign direct investment]” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2017). In order to attract FDI the regime has also made changes to indigenization legislation, decreeing that in the mining sector the 51 percent local ownership requirement would only apply to diamonds and platinum (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018A). In an attempt to “reframe the National Question beyond the rhetoric of the liberation struggle and land reform,” while still asserting the baseline importance of national sovereignty, the Mnangagwa regime touted a new model of economic development based on the Chinese and Rwandan experiences. The purported aim was to establish a more “corporatised executive authority” based on a more efficient civil service which would provide a “one-stop shop” to speed up investor requirements. This narrative further promised that no longer would “ragged trousered nationalists” be allowed to preside over starving Zimbabweans while “feeding them with the twin alibi and sweet lie of indigenisation and empowerment” (Charamba, 2018A).

An addition to these policy initiatives was a promise to move against corruption, with the regime targeting members of the G40 in the process. The regime also gazetted a three-month moratorium within which those involved in financial malpractices would be allowed to return the funds and assets back to the country “with no questions being asked or charges filed.” On the expiry of this moratorium period the government stated its intention to prosecute selected individuals. In March 2018 it published a list of 157 names of people and companies who were reported to have externalized funds worth US\$464,204,171 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018B). The publication of the list led to many disputes around its credibility and the state has yet to proceed any further on the matter. The Office of the President and Cabinet also announced in January 2018 that it was now mandatory for cabinet ministers, their deputies, permanent secretaries, and senior principal directors and CEOs of parastatals to declare any assets exceeding US\$100,000 of movable property by February 2018 (Daily News, 2018A).

It is, of course, clear that the corruption of Mnangagwa and key members of the new regime was not targeted even though there was clear evidence of a long history of corrupt activities within this group. In 2002 a UN report on the exploitation of natural resources in the DRC reported on the various networks involved in these exploitative activities:

The key strategist for the Zimbabwean branch of the elite network is the Speaker of Parliament and former National Security Minister Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa. Mr. Mnangagwa, has won strong support from senior military and intelligence officers for an aggressive policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

(UN Security Council, 2002, p. 8)

Amongst the senior military figures mentioned were Air Marshal Perence Shiri, the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Development and Brigadier General Sibusiso Moyo, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The looting of resources in the DRC was followed by what Saunders describes as the “privileged access to Marange diamonds” by a “shadow axis of power” which included “state security forces and factions of the Zanu PF elite” (Saunders, 2016, p. 35).

Clearly, Mnangagwa’s intent was to quickly move the debate away from the manner in which he grasped the presidency to a discussion on the economy and renewed international engagements. The dominant mood of seeking economic and political stability at almost any cost in Zimbabwe has provided the space for the military to legitimize their intervention in favor of Mnangagwa. The careful avoidance of the term “coup d’état,” and the formal if not substantive adherence to the language and processes of constitutionalism in the party and the state provided the veneer of “legality” through which SADC, the AU and the rest of the international community premised their muted compliance with the militarily imposed Mnangagwa dispensation. This muted response is in accordance with the contemporary international context in which, in Abrahamsen’s words, “militarism is infused with the values of security and its political force is conditional on the prior securitization of underdevelopment and poverty” (Abrahamsen, 2018, p. 3). Within this framework the Zimbabwean military’s intervention resonates with early 21st-century conceptions linking development and stability to security interventions leading to the marginalization of democratic concerns. The military also ensured the safety of Mugabe² and his family and at an official level continued to revere his role in the liberation struggle and the selective construction of the legacy of that struggle, which has always been central to the legitimizing discourse of Zanu PF (Ranger, 2004).

Regime Challenges

However, the new regime faced serious challenges. Firstly the promise of economic growth and recovery, particularly through the neoliberal frame in which its policies were cast, led to major social challenges in the first quarter of 2018. This was particularly the case in the public sector, in which the largest number of formal sector workers were located, and where the government had pledged to reduce public expenditure. In March 2018, doctors went on strike demanding better conditions of service as well as the provision of adequate hospital equipment and essential drugs to treat patients (NewsDay, 2018C). This action was followed by a nurses’ strike in April 2018, resulting in Vice President Chiwenga ordering the firing of all striking workers. This clumsy and illegal decision was immediately challenged in the High Court by the Zimbabwe Nurses Association, and was later withdrawn after further negotiations with the government (Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, 2018).

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Secondly, it was unclear how the Mnangagwa regime intended to deal with the continuing problems around the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. The differentiated forms of land ownership that emerged since the early 2000s, in addition to the regime's promise to deal with compensation of former white commercial farmers, "according to the Constitution," would require a great deal of outside financial assistance and a variegated land policy.

Thirdly there continued to be tensions between the coup leaders and those who maintained their support for Mugabe. Moreover, these tensions threatened to spread through the security sector, where tensions between the army on the one hand and the police (ZRP) and CIO on the other marked the factional battles in the ruling party that had simmered since the removal of Joyce Mujuru in 2014. The changes in the leadership of both the ZRP and the CIO in the immediate aftermath of the coup were a clear indication of these tensions. The tensions were also evident in Zanu PF's primary election process where several leading Mnangagwa supporters were beaten in the polls, with one of them even claiming that his defeat was "engineered by the police in charge of the polls" (NewsDay, 2018B).

Fourthly, the persistent legacy of the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland in the mid-1980s will continue to haunt Zanu PF's history and the politics of postcolonial Zimbabwe. The growing momentum in favor of national accountability for this and other periods of violence since 1980 could not be assuaged by any cosmetic interventions of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission established under the 2013 Constitution.

Lastly, for the so-called reformist agenda military regime to move forward Zanu PF would have needed to conduct a broadly acceptable "free and fair" election in 2018. Aside from movement on the biometric voter registration process and the more tolerant political language of the state, none of the other fundamental reforms called for by the opposition and the international players was carried out by mid-2018. These included: the non-partisan involvement of the security sector and traditional leaders; impartiality of the Zimbabwe Election Commission; open access to the state-controlled media; and transparency around procurement of voting material. This was not surprising as studies of post-coup politics from the 1950s indicate "coups are not systematically correlated with democratization" (Derpanopoulos et al., 2016, p. 6). Given the dominant regional and international push for stabilization there remained a real danger that a version of the Egyptian outcome post-Mubarak could take root in Zimbabwe. The skillful use of a reformist political language, combined with the popular support for the removal of Mugabe, could deepen the control of the military and set the stage for a new dynastic presidential succession process in the security sector (Tansel & De Smet, 2017).

Challenges for the Opposition

The deeply divided opposition political forces were further weakened by the November events. Their first reaction to the coup was for the most part one of approval. Douglas Mwonzora, the Secretary General of the MDC-Tsvangirai, applauded it: "We are happy

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with what the army has done. It has done a good thing” (NewsDay, 2017). Even at a later date, when they had had more time to reflect on these events, the response of the opposition was at best ambivalent. After Mnangagwa paid a courtesy call on Morgan Tsvangirai, who was at the time seriously ill with colon cancer, the latter called on the new administration to “earn legitimacy through free, fair and credible elections.” However he also looked forward to a partnership with the new regime:

My engagement with President Mnangagwa must herald a new page in our policies – a page in which the opposition is considered a partner and not an enemy of state. The visit can be built upon by truly well-meaning Zimbabweans to herald a new politics of engagement in our country.

(Tsvangirai, 2018)

In the changed political context the opposition forces faced three challenges. Firstly, the cumulative effects of state repression, violence, state infiltration, the effects of repeated party splits and the loss of financial support from former donors greatly weakened the structures and capacity of the various MDC formations. The long illness and finally death of the central figure of the opposition, Morgan Tsvangirai, on February 14 also exacerbated the succession tensions within the MDC-T. In 2016 Tsvangirai had appointed two Vice Presidents, Nelson Chamisa and Elias Mudzuri, in addition to the existing Vice President, Thokozani Khupe, who had been elected at the 2014 Congress. The decision was most likely meant to respond to ethnic/ regional and gender issues in the MDC-T, namely the belief that an individual who was both a woman and from the minority Ndebele ethnic group, like Khupe, could not win a national election in the country. However it presented a major constitutional challenge for the succession issue in the party, resulting in ongoing uncertainty around its future leadership. While Tsvangirai had made these appointments supposedly based on amendments to the party constitution at the 2014 Congress, in fact, the Congress had merely adopted resolutions regarding amendments to the party constitution. There was no evidence that such amendments were actually made, and in its subsequent version the MDC-T constitution did not reflect the organizational reality of the party (Matyszak, 2018). According to Article 9.21.1 of the party constitution, in the event of the death or resignation of the President, the Deputy President would assume the role of Acting President pending the holding of an Extraordinary Congress required take place within a year of the death or resignation (NewsDay, 2018A).

Following Tsvangirai’s death on February 14, 2018 the uncertain legacy he left behind exploded in the public sphere. Nelson Chamisa moved quickly into the void. He convened a National Council meeting which endorsed him as the new President of the party, a decision whose legality was questioned. Alex Magaisa (in NewsDay, 2018A) rightly asked how a party that was founded on the struggles for constitutionalism in Zimbabwean politics could “condone breaches in its own constitution?” Moreover, in Chamisa’s bid for power his supporters, through a militia force known as the “Vanguard,” carried out a series of violent acts against his competitors for the party presidency. The attacks on Vice

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President Thoko Khupe and her supporters in particular were widely condemned for the “tribal and gender insensitive content of the language” (Western Region Collective, 2018). Following this violence Thoko Khupe and two of her key supporters in the party leadership, Abednico Bhebe former Organising Secretary and Obert Gutu former party spokesperson, were fired from the MDC in March 2018. In the same month, Lovemore Moyo, the former National Chair of the party, resigned his post, accusing the Chamisa leadership of losing direction and deviating from the founding principles of the party (NewsDay, 2018D). In April 2018 Khupe was recalled from parliament after the Speaker of the House received a letter from the Chamisa MDC-T informing him that Khupe ceased to be a member of the party and no longer represented the interests of the party in parliament (Herald, 2018B). Khupe had already signaled her intent to run in the 2018 presidential election as the lawful MDC-T candidate.

Secondly, the challenges around uniting the opposition and attempts to build an electoral alliance to confront Mnangagwa Junta in in 2018 failed persistently. By mid-2018 there were three opposition alliances. The most popular grouping was the MDC Alliance, led by the MDC-T. Of the two smaller alliances one, the People’s Rainbow Coalition, was led by Joyce Mujuru, while the other, Coalition of Democrats (CODE), was led by a former member of the MDC, Elton Mangoma.

After the split in the original MDC in 2005 (Raftopoulos, 2006) attempts to build electoral alliances in 2008 and 2013 failed. This was largely due a combination of leadership struggles and the battle for parliamentary places particularly but not solely around the Matabeleland region. Moreover, since the period of the Government of National Unity of 2009-2013 there had been increased fractionalization of party structures within the opposition. This was the result of attempts to build new political alliances in the face of changing political and economic conditions. Moreover this fractionalization led to “the faltering of an alternative hegemony”, but, it was thought, could lead to a greater pluralization of politics in the future and the expansion of platforms of participation (Moyo, 2018, p. 221).

Thirdly, the political discourse and policies of the opposition were largely appropriated by the Mnangagwa regime. The removal of Mugabe drew heavily on the “change” narrative that marked the MDC’s entry onto the political scene, while the neoliberal macroeconomic stabilization and international reengagement policies had been central to the programmatic demands of the MDCs since the early 2000s (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2018). The Mnangagwa regime’s appropriation of opposition space took on a further dimension with the death of Morgan Tsvangirai. Mnangagwa granted the opposition leader a state funeral claiming him as “one of us” and a “national figure who obdurately insisted on free, fair, credible and non-violent elections as a way of strengthening our democracy and our overall re-engagement with the rest of the world” (Herald, 2018A). The political figure and the political movement that this regime had persecuted and ostracized as an unpatriotic sell-out for nearly two decades was now brought into a discourse of national belonging as part of the massaging narrative of the coup.

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Thus, even as Zanu PF's authoritarian politics kept the ruling party in power, the opposition not only changed the key features of the dominant political messaging both in Zanu PF and at the national level, but also contributed to the succession dynamics in the ruling party through persistent threats to its continued dominance. In the often blame-ridden criticism that has emerged in appraisals of the performance of the opposition, both by Zimbabwean commentators and former financial supporters of the MDC, there has been a willful forgetfulness of how much the political and civic opposition and the leadership of individuals such as Tsvangirai have contributed to the changing political dynamics in the country. Even Mnangagwa's spokesperson, George Charamba, acknowledged Tsvangirai's contribution to the national political discourse when he wrote that Tsvangirai had contributed to Zanu PF's recognition that "individual rights were at the core of social advancement" (Charamba, 2018B).

The 2018 Elections

A central part of the coup leaders' strategy was to move beyond the shadow of the coup and to seek a new legitimacy through an election that was perceived to be peaceful and credible. In pursuit of this objective a few selective electoral reforms were implemented ahead of the 2018 elections such as the introduction of a biometric voter roll, and an invitation to international observers from the EU, US, SADC, AU and the Commonwealth to monitor and observe the elections. The election campaign was conducted under largely peaceful conditions, perhaps the most peaceful of the postcolonial period. Opposition parties were able to campaign in all parts of the country, a feature that was decidedly absent from all other elections since 2000.

In his election messaging, the Zanu PF presidential candidate Mnangagwa continued the narrative he had set out since the coup. He stressed the need for renewed international reengagement as part of the "Zimbabwe is open for business" mantra (Herald, 2017E). As one element of this narrative Mnangagwa reached out to the white and other minority communities:

We should cease to talk about who owns farms in terms of colour. We should cease talking about that. A farmer - a black farmer, a white farmer - is a Zimbabwean farmer. We should begin to develop a culture among our people to accept that we are one.

(Sunday Mail, 2018)

This ideological move sought to depoliticize the strongly nationalist and anti-imperialist language of the Mugabe regime and to emphasize a more technocratic economic message for the future. Ironically, in both his reengagement and reconciliation rhetoric Mnangagwa replicated Mugabe's politics of the 1980s.

For its part the opposition, led by the largest party, the MDC-Alliance, and its young leader, Nelson Chamisa, made it clear from very early on in the election battle that there

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were serious problems in the electoral process that had not been dealt with sufficiently. These included the partisan status of the Zimbabwe Election Commission, the late release of the voters' roll, a lack of transparency around the printing of the ballot, and the lack of equal access to the publicly owned state-run electronic and print media. Moreover, Chamisa stated throughout his campaign that his party would not accept any result other than his presidential victory and that of his party (The Zimbabwean, 2018). This statement clearly set the scene for a confrontation with the ruling party. Notwithstanding their differences the election manifestos of the two major parties converged in significant ways. As one commentary observed of the manifestos written in "mostly technical-based jargon," there "is a new consensus in town: Market-based development" (Zimbabwe Independent, 2018C).

Before the election, international observers from the EU and the U.S. reiterated the concerns of the opposition. The EU warned that the elections "were a critical test of Zimbabwe's reform process" and that "great efforts need to be made to ensure public and political confidence in the 2018 polls" (European Union, 2018B). For its part the U.S. observer mission under the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute noted that even though it found "notable improvements in the political environment and electoral preparations as compared to prior elections," a "number of significant opportunities to break with the past and restore confidence in advance of the polls have been missed thus far" (IRI/NDI, 2018). For both the EU and the U.S. any further economic reengagement with a new dispensation would depend largely on the credibility of the elections.

In an opinion poll in mid-July 2018 Afro Barometer predicted a close result for the presidential elections, with 40 percent of citizens interviewed saying they would vote for Mnangagwa and 37 percent preferring Chamisa (Afro Barometer, 2018). The final result after the 30 July plebiscite was close to this prediction. In a record turnout of 4.8 million voters, 85 percent of those registered, Mnangagwa received 50.6 percent and Chamisa 44.3 percent of the poll. Predictably, most of Mnangagwa's support came from Zimbabwe's rural provinces, Mashonaland, Midlands and Masvingo, while Chamisa dominated the urban areas of Harare and Bulawayo. Both Mnangagwa and Chamisa improved on the votes of their predecessors, Mugabe and Tsvangirai, in the 2013 election. Mnangagwa gained 350,000 more votes than the former president, while Chamisa doubled Tsvangirai's votes. Thus, despite all the challenges faced by the opposition, Chamisa performed very well, drawing on a combination of the euphoria of Mugabe's demise, the optimism around the elections, and the large number of young voters, with 70 percent of registered voters aged between 20 and 44 years. There may also have been Zanu PF supporters who voted against Mnangagwa for the presidency but for Zanu PF in the parliamentary vote, reflecting of the factionalism in the ruling party. The parliamentary vote resulted in a much more decisive win for Zanu PF. The ruling party won 144 seats while the MDC Alliance figure was 64, giving Zanu PF a two-thirds majority in the legislature (Herald, 2018D; International Crisis Group, 2018; Kubatana.net, 2018; Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network, 2018).

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In preliminary statements on the elections both the EU and the U.S. were critical of the process even while recognizing the progress made in terms of the absence of large-scale violence. The EU statement read:

The elections were competitive, the campaign was largely peaceful and, overall, political freedoms during the campaign, including freedom of movement, assembly and speech, were respected. However, the misuse of state resources, instances of coercion and intimidation, partisan behaviour by traditional leaders and overt bias in state media, all in favour of the ruling party, meant that a truly level playing field was not achieved, which negatively impacted on the democratic character of the electoral environment.

(European Union, 2018C)

A similar statement was made by U.S. observers, with the Trump administration having passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Amendment Act of 2018 just before the elections setting out the economic and political reforms that were a prerequisite for further U.S. engagement with the Mnangagwa regime (Bloomberg, 2018). Predictably, the SADC Observer Mission gave the election a much more positive spin, even though it also pointed to problems around the use of traditional leaders to intimidate and coerce the rural population and the unequal access of the opposition to the public media (SADC, 2018).

True to its word, the MDC Alliance immediately challenged the election results. Opposition supporters took to the streets on August 1, 2018 rejecting the election outcome. The response of the state was a familiar one with soldiers moving in to replace police control of the crowd resulting in the shooting of six citizens and injuries to many others. This violence was followed by the arrest MDC Alliance members including one of its leaders, Tendai Biti, who unsuccessfully attempted to seek asylum in Zambia in fear of his life. The EU, US, Canadian, and Swiss issued a statement noting “with grave concern the eruption of violence and occurrence of serious human rights abuses following the peaceful election” (European Union, 2018D). The official response from both Mnangagwa and the head of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, Valerio Sibanda, was a denial that any order had been given to deploy the army against the demonstrators. This led to speculation that a new succession battle had begun between Mnangagwa and his Vice President and Minister of Defence Constantino Chiwenga, that reflected the post-coup tensions within the ruling party. The exact nature of this tension between the two leaders was the subject of much debate and concern (Tendi, 2018).

Following the public demonstration and the violent response of the state the MDC Alliance challenged the Zimbabwe Election Commission’s Presidential result in the Constitutional Court. The Chamisa challenge was based on section 93 of the Constitution accusing the Commission of “irregularity, involving a mistake or non-compliance with the law.” This irregularity in turn “affected the validity of the election, meaning that it deprived citizens of a free and fair election” (Chamisa, 2018). The irregularities included several claims against the Zimbabwe Election Commission: lack of independence; failure

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to provide a complete voters' roll; counting of presidential ballots; and undue influence on voters. The Constitutional Court judgment on Chamisa's challenge dismissed it on the basis of the lack of "clear, sufficient, direct and credible evidence that the irregularities that he alleges marred the election process materially existed" (Nehanda Radio, 2018). The decision came as little surprise, largely because of the politically compromised nature of the judiciary especially since the events after 2000. However, the lack of sufficient evidence provided by the opposition in its challenge also pointed to the decrease in financial support for opposition election monitoring and the lack of capacity in opposition structures in the 2018 elections.

Following the Constitutional Court decision the MDC Alliance stated that while it respected the court it did not accept its "manifestly unjust decision" (MDC, 2018). The U.S. State Department urged all parties to "respect the Zimbabwe constitution and rule of law" while also encouraging the Government of Zimbabwe "to hold substantive discussions with all stakeholders and implement electoral and broader political and economic reforms" (US Department of State, 2018). The violent state response to the opposition demonstration on August 1, and the questions raised over the 2018 elections in the Constitutional Court challenge by Chamisa, meant that political legitimacy remained a challenge for the Mnangagwa regime in the aftermath of the elections. This in turn presented obstacles to his new look international reengagement policy. After his presidential inauguration on August 26, 2018 Mnangagwa's first response was to appoint a Commission of Inquiry into the post-election violence on August 1, 2018. The members of this commission included prominent African political and military figures, a QC from the U.K. and Zimbabwean academic, and legal figures. The outcome of the findings of this commission may impact on future relations between the Mnangagwa regime and Western countries, and create new tensions within Zimbabwe's security sector.

Conclusion

While there was never much doubt that the military played a central role in Zanu PF's form of rule throughout the postcolonial period, there was also a belief that "politics ruled the gun" and that the Mugabe-led political leadership was firmly in control of the ruling party and the state. Mugabe's control of the tenure of the military leaders, their access to different forms of economic accumulation, and a shared belief in the ideal of the liberation struggle provided a form of cohesive politics that weathered the storm of severe economic crisis and international isolation for many years. However, the growing battle to be the nonagenarian Mugabe's successor brought with it an increased factionalism in the ruling party that threatened the position of key military figures and senior liberation leaders. This led to the formal and overt assertion of military power over the party and the state in the form of the November 2017 coup. In its attempt to reshape the image of this military intervention the Mnangagwa-led regime for the most part appropriated the reformist political and economic language of the opposition, calling for neoliberal economic policies, deeper reengagement with Western countries, and a formal commitment to free and fair elections in 2018. The contested outcome of the 2018

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elections and the ambivalent responses from Western governments to this event left continued legitimacy challenges for the Mnangagwa regime in 2018. Nevertheless, it would come as little surprise if beyond 2018 the Mnangagwa dispensation was accepted by the African region and broader international forces as the lesser evil for a “stabilizing” future. The British Prime Minister, during her visit to South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria in August 2018 in the UK’s search for increased trade relations with Africa in the post Brexit period, praised Mnangagwa’s decision to establish the Commission of Inquiry into the post-election violence. In the same month Germany’s Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development visited Zimbabwe to discuss new economic cooperation. Both events pointed to the increased possibility of the normalization of relations between the Zimbabwe regime and Western countries in the aftermath of the 2018 elections.

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Notes:

(1.) This position was also stated in an interview with a senior war veteran in Cape Town on February 9, 2018.

(2.) Mugabe has also been granted a very generous retirement package. It includes: staff support, office and equipment, a fully furnished official residence, four international trips per annum for him and his spouse, and full health benefits.

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