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Zimbabwe: A former Liberation Movement in Government and radical public policy transition since November 2017?

There has been a seismic paradigm shift in public policy through the structural reform of the former liberation movement/political party, the Zimbabwean African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). This included a radical state reconfiguration stemming from the military assisted transition in Zimbabwe called *Operation Restore Legacy*, launched over 15 November to 18 December 2017. The outcome of the ‘hard transition’ within ZANU-PF reflected an internal factional struggle for political succession, displacing the octogenarian 94-year-old leader, Robert G. Mugabe. Mugabe was expelled from the ruling party on the threat of an ongoing, cross-party parliamentary impeachment process, compelling him to ‘resign’ and hand over power to his deputy, Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, popularly known as ED.

On the last day of *Operation Restore Legacy*, several senior officers from the Chief of Defence Staff were retired and appointed in [political positions](#). Air Marshall P. Shiri, was appointed as Minister of Agriculture; Major General S. Moyo, who had announced the Operation on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, became Foreign Minister; and Major General, Dr E. Rugeje, was appointed as the Commissar of a reformed ZANU-PF party. There were also immediate promotions and appointments within the security establishment where, significantly, command of the Central Intelligence Organization went to Mr Isaac Moyo, a civilian and former Ambassador to South Africa. In a single development the country’s highest governing entities such as cabinet and the ruling party’s politburo, reflected a good portion of former military personnel. The parallel appointments in the security establishment also went to officers who seemingly belonged to the victorious faction in the power struggle against the now defeated Generation 40 (G40) that previously operated under the deposed Mugabe and his wife.

It is significant to note that as ZANU-PF prepared for the March 2018 elections, all candidates for parliamentary and local government submitted their curriculum vitae to retired Lieutenant General, Dr Rugeje. He was the *de facto* gate-keeper responsible for selecting membership

from only 'preferred' candidates. Whilst addressing a political rally in Bulawayo on 23 June 2018, in what can be seen as a gesture of defiance to assassinate him, a grenade was thrown at ED, which exploded without harming him. Later commentaries, including from ED himself, allegedly accused the perceived, disgruntled G40 faction of ZANU-PF.

Soon afterwards, ED called for 'free and fair' national elections scheduled for 30 July 2018. These elections were open to international observers comprising 46 countries and 15 international organizations, with the European Union as well as the US based National Democratic Institute deploying scores of [expert observers](#) to the event. After three days of waiting for election results, activists from the political opposition started with street protests.¹ Demonstrators in Harare were confronted with armed military units, indiscriminately firing live ammunition which resulted in six fatalities and several injured; prompting an outcry from local, regional and international observers. The Movement for Democratic Change Alliance disputed the subsequent midnight announcement of ED as the winner, however, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of ED as the duly elected president on 24 August 2018.

To the credit of the new administration, a perceptively independent seven-person commission, led by the former South African president [Kgalema Mothanthé](#), was appointed to inquire into the protest and live firing by military units. In spite of vociferous criticism of at least two members of the commission, Prof Lovemore Madhuku, an aspiring presidential candidate and a declared ZANU-PF supporter and Prof C. Manyeruka, the composition of the commission remained unaltered.

Against the background of the unfortunate handling of election result protestors, the question is then what are the state and party reforms that have occurred in Zimbabwe since 15 November 2017?

The "New Dispensation" and Zimbabwean administration under President ED has embarked upon repositioning the country as "Open for Business" while adopting radical public policy reversals in comparison to the previous 38 years. Some of the more fundamental shifts [include](#):

- the policy of re-engagement with the West and its institutions such as the World Bank (the IMF), other international financial institutions as well as re-application to the Commonwealth, alongside announcements by Chinese investors of large projects;
- a slightly adjusted Indigenous Act and its 51% in order to attract investment;
- announcing the alignment of a 'one person one farm' allocation to be administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, while returning fast-tracked farms to dispossessed white farmers and promising some compensation by September 2018 in order to boost food production and security; and
- introducing a new Cabinet with an independent financial expert, invited from the diaspora, to address the endemic economic malaise together with the appointment of a white Olympic medal winner to head the Sports and Recreation portfolio.

In conclusion, has the break with the past in Zimbabwe's political trajectory provided the basis for a new path? In the struggle for succession, ED clearly had significant support from ZANU-PF party structures, an acknowledged grip of the public sector complimented by overwhelming support of the security establishment except for isolated leaderships within the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the intelligence organisation, CIO. Soon afterwards,

¹ In Zimbabwe the Zimbabwe Election Commission is often viewed with suspicion given its partisan 2008 record when it took five weeks to announce the presidential election results.

senior officers from the CIO have been retired with calls to 'retrain' the ZRP. What this reveals is that there may still be elements viewed with suspicion from supporters of the deposed Mugabe. In that case, the renewed ZANU-PF faction has a number of challenges to address.

- First, to reconcile with the internal 'aggrieved' faction that feels marginalized and victimized for having created the policy disaster that turned the once thriving country into a 'laughing stock'.
- Second, to create cohesion within the reformed ZANU-PF now under the military, providing some sense of division between the civilian authority and the uniformed players in civil-military relations going forward.
- Third, a wider political challenge within the country, evident by the entrenched distance between urban and rural votes depicted in the just ended polls. While ZANU-PF swept the rural vote, the urban area has remained firmly on the side of the political opposition.

Beyond domestic constraints, a latent ideological challenge remains: reconstituting democracy, a market economy and re-engagement with the West predicated on adherence to international norms on human rights, free press and rights of association. On this, ZANU-PF will not be entirely in control and may flounder in the implementation. To this end, reversing ZANU-PF's ideological positions that are incompatible with the above may find the new dispensation short on tolerance. The latter relates to the heavy-handed reaction to street protests in early August 2018 following the delay in announcing the presidential electoral result which could serve as a dress rehearsal of things to come.

Additional reading

1. Mnangagwa promises policy clarity, consistency, *Newsday*, 9 March 2018
<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/03/mnangagwa-promises-policy-clarity-consistency/>
 2. End of Operation Restore Legacy | *The Herald*, <https://www.herald.co.zw/end-of-operation-restore-legacy/>
 3. Zim: Operation Restore Legacy stands at ease | *Pretoria News - IOL*
<https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria.../zim-operation-restore-legacy-stands-at-ease-1247288...>
Dec 19, 2017.
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