

Salvation or subversion: did Zimbabwe's military protect or undermine democracy in its 2017 coup?

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Abstract

Justifications, initial declarations (IDs), popular acclamation and the silence of regional bodies and neighbours made the coup in Zimbabwe appear to protect democracy. However, when the coup is reconciled with historic civil-military relations in Zimbabwe and the events immediately preceding the coup, what emerges is military action in Zimbabwe in 2017 that further weakened the country's already frail democracy. In the light of the backdrop to the coup, the events that have unfolded in Zimbabwe between November 2017 and January 2018 have revealed a coup that has imposed a One-Party mentality, consecrated the power of a military-civilian "Corporation of Power" and of barracks democracy, placed private interests over general good and deprived an already deprived electorate from the right to choose its own President. Furthermore, the alleged militarisation of the government and the ruling ZANU-PF party has raised questions on whether it is the civilians or military in control and whether ZANU-PF will be willing to cede power if it loses the ensuing harmonised elections scheduled for 30 July 2018.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, coup, November 2017, protect, undermine, democracy

Introduction

Military coups are essentially undemocratic. Yet, Varol has argued that sometimes a military coup d'état may be geared towards protecting democracy.¹ In November 2017 a peculiar coup² took place in Zimbabwe leading to the overthrow of long-time ruler, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, in the disguise of his resignation. The trigger for this coup seemed to be connected to Mugabe's move to place his wife, Grace, as the head of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), a position that might have eventually led her to become President of Zimbabwe. To achieve his aims Mugabe began by firing the most prominent candidate for this position, Emerson Mnangagwa, first from the Vice Presidency of the Republic on 06 November 2017 then from the ZANU-PF on 08 November 2017. In the wake of these sackings, Mnangagwa fled to Mozambique where he was subsequently airlifted to South Africa. These events were not unconnected to the military backlash that followed. It would seem that the military had chosen its side in the factional struggles within the ZANU-PF that clearly pitted Grace's Generation 40 or G40 faction against the Lacoste faction comprised of the old guard. The military's pick was Mnangagwa, a top brass of the Lacoste, who eventually became President after the army had purged the ZANU-PF of the G40 and cornered Mugabe into resignation. The ouster of Mugabe and the return and installation of Mnangagwa as President of the Republic was met with popular support in the Zimbabwean population while the international community, especially the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) turned a blind eye to the coup. One would therefore think that the army had truly salvaged the country from the usurpation of the State and from impending violent conflict. So as the dust settles this whole situation begs the question: did the army protect democracy or did it undermine it through its actions?

This question addresses how the military coup affected democracy at the moment it occurred. While the coup itself has far reaching consequences for Zimbabwe's democracy, the article focuses on whether democracy turned out victorious or whether it suffered as a direct result of the military actions and why. The temporal framework is from November 2017 to January 2018. This period covers the coup and the appointment of Mnangagwa's first cabinet.

The army had justified the coup in its initial declarations (IDs) by stating that it was "only targeting criminals around [Mugabe] who are committing crimes that are causing social and

¹Varol, O. 2012. "The Democratic Coup d'Etat". **Harvard International Law Journal**, Vol. 53 No.2. pp. 291-356.

²Pigou, P. 2017. "Zimbabwe's Very Peculiar Coup". **Crisis Group Commentary**.

economic suffering in the country in order to bring them to justice.” Apparently, the army was trying to prevent any form of political corruption that would undermine the general interest and as a result, negate democratic rule. However, the backdrop of the coup seems to show that the underlying motivations for the coup d'état revolved around placing the army's own pick for the Presidency to protect its interests that were being threatened by the no less undemocratic G(40) ZANU-PF faction. Substituting the electorate in this manner is only the consequence of the mess done with democracy in Zimbabwe through a history of rather undemocratic civil-military relationships that date back to the liberation struggles that sped up in the late 1970s. Therefore, this article will argue that the November 2017 coup gravely undermined Zimbabwean democracy as it placed private interests over general interests, consecrated One-Party and military rule and further deprived the electorate of its right to select a President.

Maigasa made an early attempt at analysing the possible implication of the 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe.³ His questions revolved around six themes that arose from his analysis of Chiwenga's statement. These themes are: challenge to Mugabe, factional defense, usurpation, exposure to charges, pre-emptive strike, “nuclear power”.

Hamill addressed the expectation that President Mnangagwa will re-direct Zimbabwe's democracy, placing it on the right course.⁴ For Hamill, this is “wishful thinking”. Hamill points out the three barriers to a more democratic path for Zimbabwe spelled by the coup. These barriers are the ZANU-PF, President Mnangagwa, and the ZDF. Hamill warned that observers must see that real democratic change means an electoral risk that might oust this network from the enjoyment of State resources it has been looting since independence.

Southall analysed the implications of Mnangagwa's coming to power through the 2017 coup in terms of change.⁵ Southall questions if the new Head of State will depart from the type of governance and politics that had characterised Mugabe's ZANU-PF since independence. For him, the new Cabinet of Mnangagwa asserted the military's role in Zimbabwe's politics while the President's authoritarian reforms signal more of continuity than change.

³ Maigasa, A. 2017. “Chiwenga's Statement: possible Meaning, Implications”. **NewsDay**. Retrieved February 24, 2018 from <https://goo.gl/W6jRua>

⁴ Hamill, J. 2017. “The 3 barriers blocking Zim's progress: Zanu-PF, Mnangagwa and army”. **news24**. Retrieved February 24, 2018 from <https://goo.gl/yvLB2T>

⁵ Southall, R. 2017. “Bob's Out, the Croc is in: Continuity or Change in Zimbabwe?” **Africa spectrum**, Vol. 52, No.3, pp.81-94.

This paper will use the questions and/or arguments raised by these three authors as a framework for analysis. In the first part of the paper, we look at the civil-military relations in Zimbabwe in a bid to understand the political environment in which the coup occurred. In the second part, we present the coup in order to understand the actors, their positions and the immediate outcomes of the coup. In the third part, we examine, in the light of the background to the coup, how the underlying motivations of the coup affected democratic values, revealing a logic of power at odds with democratic practice and determining how the purge and counter-purge in the ZANU-PF strengthened the usurpation of the State. In the fourth part, we study how the coup might have sidelined the electorate in the democratic process. We conclude the paper by drawing implications of the coup for democracy in Zimbabwe.

Historical perspective and entrance of Zimbabwean military into politics

The Zimbabwean military has been involved in politics since 1980. It propped up the government of the former president Robert Mugabe while muting perceived opponents.⁶ However, since the 1990s Zimbabwean politics has had its turns and twists and was shaped by the brutal succession fights within the ruling ZANU-PF party. At first, the internal battles to succeed Mugabe were between a faction controlled by the late retired General Solomon Mujuru, who was positioning his wife Joice Mujuru for the presidency, against another faction believed to have been led by Emmerson Mnangagwa, the current President of Zimbabwe. The confrontation between these two factions reached a climax in 2014 when Mugabe fired Joice Mujuru as Vice-President and also dismissed her alleged allies from the party and government.⁷

There is evidence which shows that from 2000, Zimbabwe's military began to be more strongly associated with politics.⁸ Military intrusion in politics was confirmed when in 2002 the military led by the late General Vitalis Zvinavashe issued a dossier a day before presidential elections stating that the presidency was a “straitjacket” and they will not salute any person without liberation war credentials, an action that supported the ruling party candidate.⁹ This was a direct opposition to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) a party founded in 1999 to

⁶ Maringira, G. 2017. “Politics, Privileges and Loyalty in Zimbabwe National Army”. **African Studies Review**, Vol. 60 No. 2.

⁷ Tendi, B.-M. 2016. “State Intelligence and the Politics of Zimbabwe's Presidential Succession”. **African Affairs**, Vol. 115, No. 459, pp. 203-224.

⁸Masunungure, E. 2011. “Zimbabwe's Militarized Electoral Authoritarianism”. **Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 65, No. 1, pp. 47-64.

⁹Rupiya, M. 2011. “The Military Factor in Zimbabwe's Political and Electoral Affairs”. Retrieved on 18 February 2018 from <https://goo.gl/Czadw8>.

capitalize on the growing unpopularity of the autocratic Mugabe, who led Zimbabwe from independence in 1980.

The economic meltdown of 2008 resulted in the deployment of the military in the key areas of the economy. Mugabe went on to overdrive militarising strategic public institutions including government-owned enterprises, independent commissions and quasi-government programmes having the military in control.¹⁰ For instance, in notable projects like Command Agriculture, a facility where government provided resources for farming a specific crop. The farmer is then expected to repay using the harvested crop. However, from 2015 onwards the military, specifically the then Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) commander, General Constantino Chiwenga, and now Vice-President, openly meddled in politics in support of ZANU-PF faction associated with the then Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa. After Joice Mujuru was sacked, two factions emerged in ZANU-PF namely the Lacoste faction that endorsed the ascendance of the then Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa and the Generation 40 (G40) that opposed the rise of Mnangagwa in favour of Grace Mugabe. Chiwenga allegedly supported the Lacoste and was involved in heated exchanges through the State media with the then Higher Education Minister, Professor Jonathan Moyo, who is aligned to the G40 faction in 2016-2017.

In late July 2017, Mugabe accused the military of being heavily involved in politics especially in the fierce succession war raging in the ruling party. Mugabe said that the military involvement in his party's struggle over who will succeed him amounted to "a coup." Indirectly responding to allegations that military leaders were actively supporting then Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa, Mugabe said: "The military has no right...to [interfere] with...political processes." He said that in the ZANU-PF, "politics leads the gun, not the other way round."¹¹ This was a clear departure from his known view that the "gun leads politics".

Mugabe was wrong, gun leads politics: Mnangagwa finally gets his coup?

Internal tensions in the ZANU-PF had reached a point where they could no longer be "stomached" at the 4 November ZANU-PF rally in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's second largest city). The atmosphere of the rally was laden with the conflict between Grace Mugabe and Mnangagwa underlaid by the question of who will succeed President Mugabe. While Grace voiced her anger and opposition to anything Mnangagwa, this latter stayed calm and let the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Zhangazha, W., Chidza, R., & Ndebele, H. 2017. "Mugabe Attacks Military Chiefs". (28 July). **The Independent**. Retrieved February 25, 2018 from <https://goo.gl/VL3p3d>

crowd do the job for him. Grace was booed by the crowd, a situation that caused Mugabe to directly threaten Mnangagwa with sacking.¹² The next day, Sunday 5 November 2017, at a Church Interface Rally at Rufaro Stadium, Grace continued her scathing attack at Mnangagwa. She made at least seven accusations against Mnangagwa,¹³ the most serious one being that “[Mnangagwa] actually wanted to wrestle power from the President.” She continued that: “Let me tell you, since the 1980s he has always wanted a coup...” Thereafter, Grace appeared in a very celebratory mood as if to say she was already “*en fête*” for what was to come, her victory over Mnangagwa.

The next day, 6 November 2017, Information Minister Simon Khaya Moyo announced the sacking of Mnangagwa from the position of Vice President of the Republic. Some of the grounds for the sacking expressed in the communiqué read by the Minister were: conduct in discharge of duties inconsistent with responsibilities; exhibition of traits of disloyalty; disrespect and unreliability, and; little probity in the execution of duties.¹⁴ The communiqué did not fail to mention the legal provision empowering the President of the Republic to fire any of his Ministers and Deputies. The roller coaster did not stop there. Mugabe had clearly entered the smear campaign against Mnangagwa. He told party supporters at ZANU-PF Headquarters on 8 November 2017 that they had, for a long time already been aware of what Mnangagwa was like but had tried to shield the rest of the party from it.¹⁵ By the end of that day, the ZANU-PF had sacked Mnangagwa from the party, clearing the way for Grace Mugabe in the December 2017 party convention. In the wake of these sackings, Mnangagwa fled to South Africa through Mozambique from where he was airlifted to South Africa. In a five-page document attributed to him, Mnangagwa castigated Mugabe and wife, Grace, blasted their way of managing the party and vowed to return to Zimbabwe to lead the party.¹⁶ Mnangagwa appeared confident that he would be able to quickly reverse what Mr. and Mrs. Mugabe had done to him.

A few days later, on Sunday 12 November 2017 the chief army General of Zimbabwe, Chiwenga, returned from an official visit in China. It is reported that once he arrived at the

¹² news24. 2017. “Mugabe threatens to sack VP as wife booed at rally”. (5 November) Retrieved February 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/XDp6Tx>

¹³Maveriq. 2017. “7 Allegations That Grace Mugabe Made Against Mnangagwa at Church Interface Rally”. (5 November) **Pindula News**. Retrieved February 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/bBkozi>

¹⁴ Kwaramba, F. 2017. “VP Mnangagwa Fired”. (7 November). **Daily News**. Retrieved February 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/4g3GX4>

¹⁵ BBC. 2017. “Zimbabwe's Sacked Vice-President Mnangagwa Flees”. (8 November). Retrieved February 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/Hu32Zm>

¹⁶ news24. 2017. “Breaking: Sacked Zimbabwe VP in exile, vows to defy Mugabe”. (8 November). Retrieved February 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/igNMZ9>

airport, officers of the Zimbabwe Republic Police's (ZRP) Support Unit attempted to arrest him but he was protected by his soldiers.¹⁷ The next day, 13 November 2017, the General issued a statement (herein [his] statement) that tabled justifications for a coup.

In his statement, Chiwenga clarified the army's position on what must be the foundation of all political action in Zimbabwe. Chiwenga told everyone that political actions and views at odds with the legacy of the 1980 liberation movement are not allowed. The legacy in question is that of freedom from colonial rule. Chiwenga was unambiguous as to who the two major "stockholders" are in the protection of this revolutionary ideal. For him, these actors are the ZDF and the ZANU-PF. Chiwenga declared that the squabbles in the party were not a party affair but a national affair. He defined the army's role within the ZANU-PF-ZDF corporation as that of "[taking] corrective measures" whenever the revolutionary ideals are threatened. Chiwenga said the quarrels within the party were caused by infiltrators who had hijacked the party and were gradually returning the nation to neo-colonialism. Moreover, these infiltrators were responsible for all the country's economic woes. This state of affairs required that the actions of the infiltrators be stopped immediately through a halt of the purging of liberators in the party. The scare of more widespread and impending conflict due to ZANU-PF in-fighting provided the rationale for Chiwenga to twist section 212 of the Constitution to mean that the army had to get involved in ZANU-PF politics.

Through his statement, Chiwenga had explicitly stated what the army was going to do with respect to the in-fighting in the ZANU-PF. The General obviously did not expect the ZANU-PF, that was eating up itself, to solve the problems he had pointed out, notably the hijacking of the revolutionary ideals and the purging of the liberators from the party. To show how "sick" the party had become by Chiwenga's standards, there was a tweet from the party after the statement instead accusing the General of "treasonable conduct".¹⁸ Would politics now lead the gun or would the gun lead politics? Chiwenga and his military colleagues would respond the next day with a show of force.

In the afternoon of 14 November 2017, the military rolled out its armada into the streets of Harare, stationing tanks and troops in strategic locations and seizing the national broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). Despite exchange of gunshots that evening, Army

¹⁷ Pindula News. 2017. "ZRP Support Unit attempted to Arrest General Chiwenga when he returned from China." (17 November). Retrieved November 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/h9dQiD>

¹⁸ BBC. 2017. "Zimbabwe: Army Chief accused of 'treasonable conduct'". (14 November). Retrieved February 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/c51MRC>

Spokesperson, Major General Sibusiso Busi Moyo, in a televised address in the early hours of 15 November insisted that the military action was not a coup. He made the IDs in line with what the army boss, Chiwenga, had said on 13 November, principally that the ZDF was only pacifying the worsening political, social and economic situation that needed to be addressed to avert violent conflict.¹⁹ The next day, “military vehicles [took] control of the streets of Harare from the early hours, controlling access to parliament, ruling party headquarters, and the Supreme Court. [Guinean President, Alpha Conde, Head of the African Union, said that it seemed like a coup]”.²⁰ That same day, “ZANU PF political commissar Saviour Kasukuwere and Higher Education minister Jonathan Moyo — [the brains behind the G40 faction in the ruling party — were said to have been] “fished out” from President Robert Mugabe’s Borrowdale mansion where they had sought sanctuary and handed over to the military.”²¹ However, it was later learnt that the two were never at Mugabe’s mansion and had since fled the country with their whereabouts not known although they frequently tweet on Twitter with Moyo having generously offered a number of interviews with British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Hardtalk programme and with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Finance Minister Ignatius Chombo was also arrested while a number of Government Ministers and the second Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko took to their heels. On 16 November 2017, a defiant Mugabe refused to resign despite growing calls for him to do so “in the best interest of the Republic”. In fact the next day he went about carrying his duties, making a first public appearance since the coup began at a graduation ceremony. However, the following day, the ZANU-PF had suddenly recovered from the Chiwenga diagnosed illness and started making calls for Mugabe to resign. The ZANU-PF went as far as backing a mass protest organised by independence war veterans in front of the Government complex aimed at putting more pressure on Mugabe to resign.²² Indeed the ZANU-PF was cured of all its recent “counter-revolutionary ailment” when on 19 November 2017 it removed Mugabe as party leader then made Mnangagwa party Chief, expelled Grace Mugabe, Mphoko and a list of other G40 members and then issued an ultimatum to a defiant Mugabe who said in a statement that day that he will preside over the party’s congress in December, to resign or face impeachment. On 20 November the ZANU-PF rolled out its impeachment plans. However, Mugabe would pre-empt

¹⁹Nyakanyanga, S., Fabricius, P., & AFP. 2017. “Zimbabwe: Army in control of state institutions, but insists not a coup”. (15 November). **Daily Market**. Retrieved November 20, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/DjmDZ4>

²⁰Mail&Guardian. 2017. “Timeline: How Zimbabwe's 'coup' unfolded”. (21 November). Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/nUVHy1>

²¹Chidza, R., & Mhlanga, B. 2017. “Army Arrests G40 'Criminals''. (16 November). **NewsDay**. Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/RH7er7>

²²*Ibid.*

these by resigning the next day 21 November 2017 hours after the impeachment proceedings had begun thus “bringing an end to 37 years of rule and sparking jubilant celebrations in the nation's streets.”²³ The question is, could Grace Mugabe now have sighed that indeed Emerson Mnangagwa had finally fulfilled his dream of organising a coup? Mugabe's resignation opened a vacancy at the helm of State and Mnangagwa, head of the ZANU-PF, was now going to fill that position as per the Constitution. He was sworn in on 24 November 2017.

On 30 November 2017 Mnangagwa appointed his cabinet. Notable appointees were: Patrick Chinamasa, member of the old guard returning as the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning; Obert Mpofu, as the Minister of Home Affairs and Culture; Air Marshal Perence Shiri, as Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement; Dr David Parirenyatwa, also retaining the position of Minister of Health and Child Care; Kembo Mohadi, as the Minister of Defence, Security and War Veterans; and, Lieutenant-General Sibusiso Moyo, as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.²⁴ Three weeks later, President Mnangagwa would appoint the first Vice President, the now-retired army Chief, Chiwenga, who ably executed the coup that led to his accession to the Presidency. Kembo Mohadi would also be named second Vice President but the Defence portfolio would now go to the first Vice President, Chiwenga.

A logic of power at odds with democracy

When Maigasa²⁵ raised the issue of whether the coup was a challenge to Robert Gabriel Mugabe, he specifically wanted to know if Chiwenga, through his statement, was challenging Mugabe's new-found view that “politics leads the gun and not the other way round”. First, when Mugabe made this assertion of “politics leads the gun” he by no means meant that the army is subject to civilian rule in the real sense. Based on his autocratic style of Government and ZANU-PF's one-party dominance, not to say one-party rule at this moment, and the historic military-civil relations in Zimbabwe, Mugabe was certainly saying that the army was keep to its role as the armed operative wing of the ZANU-PF. As Hamill has asserted:

“The defense force has never been a neutral custodian of constitutional rule. Instead, it has always been a highly politicised extension of the ruling party, a party militia in effect.

²³ BBC. 2017. “Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe resigns, ending 37-year rule”. (21 November). Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/ESfInG>

²⁴ Mnangagwa names Zimbabwe's new cabinet. 2017. (1 December) **IOL News**. Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <https://goo.gl/mKgfyu>

²⁵Maigasa, A. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

Previously its role was confined to repressing the ruling party's opponents and maintaining the party's dominance. The principle of civilian rule was respected even if this model of civil-military relations failed to meet any reasonable democratic standards. But with the coup, the military crossed a line. They determined the outcome of power struggles within the ruling party itself.²⁶

According to General Chiwenga:

"It is pertinent to restate that the Zimbabwe Defence Forces remain the major stockholder in respect to the gains of the liberation struggle and when these are threatened we are obliged to take corrective measures.

Clearly, Zanu-PF having mainly been the only Party that has ruled this country since Independence, it had become a household name to most Zimbabweans across the political divide. Therefore, it is common cause that any instability within the Party naturally impacts on their social, political and economic lives; accordingly, there is distress, trepidation and [despondency] within the nation."²⁷

Through these statements, Chiwenga not only established what we choose to call the "Corporation of Power"²⁸, that of the ZANU-PF - ZDF, but defined "voting rights" within this corporation. The ZDF was now the main shareholder. Hamill stated that:

"what this points to is an effective "barracks democracy" emerging in Zimbabwe. The military has secured a veto over the leadership of the ruling party and over the wider political process. It also reserves the right to reject election results that it does not approve of, or to take action that could prevent such results materialising in the first place".²⁹

Therefore, the coup was an effective challenge to Mugabe but more importantly to democracy. The ZDF had now decided to lead politics and hold more "voting rights" within the Corporation of Power that had been established since independence. The coup was all about enforcing military control over civilian rule, and no democracy functions like this. This enforcement is further seen in the appointments made by Mnangagwa.

Southall has noted that these appointments reflect an assertion of the military's influence in Zimbabwean government and politics.³⁰ Southall showed that Mnangagwa's first cabinet

²⁶Hamill, J. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

²⁷ Statement by General Constantino Chiwenga Commander, Zimbabwe Defence Forces Monday 13th November 2017.

²⁸ ...generally called as "civilian-military complex"

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰Southall, R. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

reflected a desire to enforce the aspirations of the old guard and its irresponsible style of running state affairs, one completely anathema to accountability and the need to be transparent and results-oriented.

In effect, when he made his appointments in December 2017, Mnangagwa was accused of appointing a “dead wood” cabinet which had the usual familiar faces. Obert Mpofu who was Minister of Home affairs retained his position. He once was Minister of Mines and Mining Development and is widely accused of corruption in the handling of the Marange diamond were Mugabe says US\$15 billion in revenue was lost. David Parirenyatwa also retained his position as Minister of Health and Child Care despite having not done any meaningful development for over a decade. Patrick Chinamasa a lawyer who had been sacked from the Finance Minister post retained it with the blessing of Mnangagwa. He had tried in vain to implement austerity measures that were publicly reversed by Mugabe.³¹

The appointment of Air Chief Marshal Perence Shiri (former commander of the air force), one of the leading figures during the coup, raised eyebrows as people criticised his competence on such a strategic Ministry as Lands, Agriculture, and Rural Resettlement. However, he was a key member of the Command Agriculture that was superintendent by Mnangagwa. The now-retired Lieutenant-General Sibusiso Moyo who announced the coup live on television was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Shiri and Moyo’s appointments are kickbacks from Mnangagwa.³²

The mediocre background of these appointees makes the coup look like a complete mockery to the people of Zimbabwe and to democracy. In his Statement, Chiwenga blamed all of Zimbabwe’s woes on the G40 whereas he himself, Mnangagwa and most of these appointees were the ones who oversaw, alongside Mugabe, the collapse of Zimbabwe, through their unlimited Government that was completely forgetful of good practices in governance such as accountability and results-based action. Threatened by the G40, they had conducted their coup and now compensated themselves. Another key issue with these appointments is that they only barely hide the usurpation of power not only by the military but principally by a single individual, Chiwenga.

³¹ *Idem*, p.85.

³² Thornycroft, P. 2017. “Just the same old ZANU-PF”, (03 December) **The Sunday Independent**; Games, D. 2017. “New Government looks much like a Reshuffling of ZANU-PF’s Deck Chairs, (7 December) **Business Day**; Southall, R. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

The way the coup turned out shows that when Chiwenga, in his statement, listed the many actions the army had undertaken in the past to enforce the liberation ideals but never usurped power, he was just bluffing. This was a cosmetic perfume sprayed to the face of the AU and the SADC to prevent them from taking any military action against the coup. The context of the coup was and is one in which these regional bodies have resolved not to recognise any military take-over again. So, conducting the coup in the way it was carried out, namely to argue for national security interests then place a civilian was not simply a way out of the regional dilemma but most likely a blindfold. The retirement of Chiwenga from the army and his appointment as first Vice President and Minister of Defence tells everyone who calls the shots. However, either the idea of calling the shots is happening only in Chiwenga's individual plans or it is an agreement between him and Mnangagwa that they compensate themselves as they believe should be the case seen their role in Zimbabwe's liberation from white minority rule to their own group rule. Therefore, either Mnangagwa is a puppet in the hands of Chiwenga or they simply plan taking turns at the helm of State. Or still, they may be satisfied with the new dispensation they command, irrespective of what happens in the future in the sense that the positions of President and first Vice President are simply to amuse the gallery, whereas there are today two Emperors ruling in Zimbabwe, Mnangagwa, and Chiwenga. Mnangagwa's first cabinet is therefore the result of a factional battle. The immediate outcome of the coup was the demise of the G40 and the victory of the Lacoste, the principal benefactors being Mnangagwa and Chiwenga. Indeed, Chiwenga was the real Political Commissar of the ZANU-PF as Mnangagwa had always pointed out.³³ Post the coup, it was now only normal he (Chiwenga) should play a major role in ruling Zimbabwe, ruling with Mnangagwa.

Beyond factionalism, this coup has all the symptoms of punishment for betrayal by Mugabe of a brotherhood that was formed in the late 1970s. In effect, the key actors in the coup, namely Robert Mugabe, Emmerson Mnangagwa and Constantino Chiwenga are liberation war heroes. After dethroning Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, Mugabe assumed the head of ZANU which later became ZANU-PF. Towards the end of the liberation struggle, it seems Mnangagwa was assigned the role of Mugabe's special assistant.³⁴ Chiwenga was one of the members of the High Command which coordinated the liberation war, having joined the fight in 1973. Upon independence, Mugabe became Prime Minister while Mnangagwa held a series of cabinet

³³Maigasa, A. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

³⁴ Tanhu, S. 2016. Understanding Mugabe and Mnangagwa's relationship. (15 January). **The Independent**. Retrieved February 26, 2018 from <https://goo.gl/8J3Q6P>

posts, first was assigned State security portfolio which controls the dreaded Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and at one time became Speaker of Parliament. He was to be appointed Vice-President in December 2014. In 1980, Chiwenga was incorporated into the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) as a Brigadier-General and rose through the ranks at the pleasure of Mugabe to Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) Commander in 2003 (an equivalent of joint chief of staff). Both Mnangagwa and Chiwenga served in government and military at the pleasure of Mugabe. Mnangagwa was State security minister when Mugabe unleashed terror on dissidents in the Matabeleland and part of Midland province. Chiwenga, who then was the commander of One Brigade, provided landing facilities and other essentials for the barbaric North Korean trained Fifth Brigade that is held responsible for killing over 20,000 people during the *Gukurahundi* (the early rains that wash away the chuff) era. During the violent 2008 general elections were over 200 people most of whom were opposition supporters were killed, Mnangagwa was Mugabe's campaign manager whilst Chiwenga provided the necessary power shield. Mnangagwa in December 2014 went on to be appointed Vice-President while Chiwenga continued to serve at the pleasure of Mugabe albeit under a yearly renewable contract.

This backdrop reveals a solid relationship, a strong bond, one forged in blood and metal, between three great warriors of the independence time. For Mugabe to have suddenly sunk deep into the pleasures provided him by his Delilah (Grace) and allow himself to be shaven to a pulp to the extent of becoming so oblivious of the hardships that his younger comrades faced, first in fighting a guerrilla war for independence and second in enforcing their rule through bloodshed, was more likely than not inconceivable for Chiwenga and Mnangagwa. Mugabe's attempt to place who in all comparison were a "small girl" and other "little kids" of the G40 above Chiwenga and Mnangagwa was certainly ill-received by these two big-weights, thus justifying a retaliation. Mugabe clearly exiled Mnangagwa and then he and the G40 not only tried to arrest Chiwenga when he arrived from China but planned to treat him like they had Mnangagwa, namely prison or exile. The coup was, therefore, a pre-emptive strike³⁵ against Mugabe and his Sunday School of G40 "babies" whose "distinctive feature is [no liberation war credentials]".³⁶ However, because of their respect for one another, Mugabe has had a generous retirement package.³⁷

³⁵ Cf. the prediction made by Maigasa, A. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

³⁶ Southall, R. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

³⁷ The Guardian. 2017. "Robert Mugabe's retirement package: 20 staff, private air travel and a fleet of cars". (28 December). Retrieved February 26, 2018 from <https://goo.gl/9hAKhU>

Therefore, the 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe resulted to the usurpation of the State cum factional defence and was possibly motivated by revenge on Mugabe for his attempt to side-line the would-be victors of the coup from hard-earned power. The defence of private interests was therefore rife in this coup, a total negation of democracy which should be the primacy of general interests before private interests. If G40 had won this battle, the story would have been no different. The State of Zimbabwe is therefore faced with a major challenge to its democracy. Networks are at work within the ZANU-PF and the ZDF to capture the State and subdue it to private interests. The faction that has prevailed is that with the “nuclear power” conceptualised by Maigasa.³⁸

Apart from military rule and the defence of private interests, Chiwenga’s statement contained a series of declarations that very unambiguously defined the winning coalition’s political philosophy as a dictatorship. Chiwenga declared that at no-one point in time should any political actions be at odds with the legacy of the 1980 liberators. This legacy is the so called freedom from colonial rule. This is one-party mentality. Moreover, the statement by Chiwenga justifying the coup gives the impression that for the now ex-General become the current first Vice President of Zimbabwe, the ZANU-PF’s longevity in power is natural or only normal and that the squabbles in the party were leading to genuine feelings of “distress, trepidation and despondence within the nation”. This sweeping statement recalls the nature of Communist States where everyone is supposed to be affected by what happens in the ruling party. Whereas in a sane political environment guided by democratic values, problems within party X can only weaken it while other political parties benefit from the situation to fill the gap, and not justify a coup. Also, based on the background of dictatorial rule by the Corporation of Power over several years, the feelings of “distress, trepidation and despondence” were more likely than not genuine in the sense of fear of what the nth hardship the ZANU-PF was eventually going to impose on the people might be as a result of its factional struggles and not genuine in the sense of Chiwenga’s most certainly intentionally misguided conception that everyone was so worried about the ZANU-PF because it is such a beloved party seen of its liberation credentials.

The broad nature of what fits within the liberation agenda gives Chiwenga and his partisans the green light to subjectively determine who is an enemy and who isn’t. Chiwenga believes that the two stockholders in the protection of the revolutionary ideal are the ZDF and the ZANU-PF. He, therefore, does not hide his allegiance to a One-Party State system. For

³⁸ Cf. the prediction made by Maigasa, A. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

Chiwenga, the military and the ZANU-PF, due to their baggage of liberation (war) credentials, should function in tandem. Zimbabweans, therefore, risk a situation where no other party may be allowed to come to power as long as the Chiwengas have got the army and reins of power, for the distinctive feature of opponents to the ZDF-ZANU-PF Corporation of Power will always be that they are not liberators.³⁹ Despite the rhetoric during the coup that the new Government will respect civil and political rights, Mnangagwa himself has stated [that], “ZANU-PF will continue ruling no matter what, while those who oppose it will continue barking.”⁴⁰ The opposition may, therefore, be faced with a major challenge in the form of whether it can be sure of playing on level grounds with the ruling party in the upcoming elections. Furthermore, it is possible that every other party or politician who doesn’t side with the one-party mentality may very well be tagged as pro-neo-colonialism. The coup tells us how such persons may be dealt with by those in power. Ironically, Chiwenga arrived from China before carrying out his coup, what was he doing there?

Further depriving the electorate of its right to choose the President

The ascendancy of Mnangagwa to the presidency was Constitutional. The filling of the presidential vacancy is regulated by section 14 of the sixth schedule of the Constitution where the ruling party is given up to 90 days to nominate a candidate to complete the remainder of the mandate of the former president. If there are two Vice-Presidents then the most recent Acting President in the days leading to the death, resignation or incapacitation of the President may become Acting President for up to 90 days as the ruling party finds a suitable successor. ZANU-PF appointed Emmerson Mnangagwa as leader of the party and seconded his name for the presidential post which was above board. Worth noting is that section 101 which deals with the succession of the office of the President will only come into effect in the year 2023.

This constitutional arrangement is not bad in itself. However, on a continent littered with nominal democracies, anocracies, dictatorships, etc, these arrangements are all too often designed with the intent of undermining democracy. In fact, even in other African settings where the Constitution provides for an interim in the case of a Presidential vacancy while an election is being prepared for, undemocratic rule, neo-patrimonialism and neo-colonialism often make the story to be no different. Gabon’s 2009 succession is a glaring example. In the case of Zimbabwe, the political context of a ZANU-PF – ZDF Corporation of Power brought

³⁹ Southall, R. 2017. *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁰Cited in Southal, R. 2017. *Op. Cit.* p.92.

to the fore by this coup revealed that the Zimbabwean electorate has been reduced to plebisciting the ZANU-PF and in the case of 2017 coup, accepting, by popular acclamation, the anointing of the crocodile⁴¹.

The backdrop to the coup, starting from the historic perspective of civil-military relations in Zimbabwe right to the coup shows a ZANU-PF-ZDF Corporation of Power that has through the years exercised unlimited Government. The above analysis of a logic of power at odds with democracy shows that the military coup of 2017 in Zimbabwe was nothing short of subversion. For Hollyer et al., “for democracy to survive, citizens must be willing to act against anti-democratic challengers, increasing...costs associated with coups...”⁴² Weingast argued that:

“in a society that has resolved its coordination dilemmas, citizens oppose violations for the same reason players of the prisoner's dilemma forgo defection; in states with limited government...beneficiaries react against violations...; in states that fail to maintain limited government...beneficiaries sometimes support violations.”⁴³

Over his long and tiresome 37 years in power, Mugabe and his military aides had enforced unlimited Government in Zimbabwe. One can therefore understand why instead of actively blocking the coup, the people supported it with shouts of joy, thereby giving the military the opportunity to usurp their right to select their leader, a right already abused over the years through manipulation of the Constitution and rigging of elections. Mnangagwa is the military’s pick and not the result of a real democratic process. That his ascendance was Constitutional only serves the purposes of the Corporation of Power in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

It can be argued that Zimbabwe’s military involvement in politics has to do with the privileges extended by the civilian political leaders in return for the military’s support, especially during and after elections. Huntington provides an interesting argument that insisted that the military must subordinate itself to civilian political authority of the day.⁴⁴ Janowitz argued that the role of the military is to protect civilians from any threat⁴⁵ and according to Baynham; the military

⁴¹ Emerson Mnangagwa is popularly known in Zimbabwe as the Crocodile.

⁴² Hollyer, J. R., Rosendorff, P., & Vreeland, J. R. 2016 “Transparency, Protest and Democratic Stability”. Retrieved on February 22, 2018 from <https://goo.gl/rnwFV1>

⁴³ Weingast, B. R., 1997, June. "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law". **American Political Science Review**, Vol. 91, pp. 245-63, (p.261).

⁴⁴ Huntington, S. 1981. *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. New York, NY: Belknap Press.

⁴⁵ Janowitz, M. 1964. *The Professional Soldier* (The Free Press Original Edition ed.). London: Collier-Macmillan Limited.

should make use of their unlimited monopoly in “organized use of force” to the benefit of society and not self-serving interests.⁴⁶

The events of 13-21 November 2017 brought to the fore the structural and historical aspects of Zimbabwe’s military problem and the need for constant meaningful civil-military reforms which the civilian control negated as it bubbled from the institutionalized support. Williamson warned that Zimbabwe was being controlled by a group of Generals who make up the Joint Operations Command.⁴⁷ As noted above, Generals have long played a political role in Zimbabwean politics, an issue which is both a political threat and a security threat to the State. The way in which the Generals engage in the political process goes against Section 208 (2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which summarily states that the military must be apolitical. The military became an extension of the ruling ZANU-PF party. This was highly unprofessional for a military expected to subordinate itself to a civilian Government. While the military should be apolitical, section 208, 211 and 218 of Zimbabwe’s Constitution, which govern the operations of the security service, prohibit the military from participating in partisan politics or interfering in electoral affairs. According to Section 211(3), the Defence Forces, “must respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all persons and be non-partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional and subordinate to civilian authority”. Section 208(2) of the Constitution states the expected conduct of members of the security services. It stipulates that it is illegal for the security sector to be non-partisan and to further the interest of a political party. It reads in part, “Neither the security services nor any of their members may in the exercise of their functions act in a partisan manner, further the interests of any political party or cause prejudice to the lawful interests of any political party and that serving members of the security services must not be active members or bearers of any political party or organization.” The way the coup unfolded showed that the ZDF deviated completely from all these constitutional and legal provisions.

Furthermore, the military undermined democracy in Zimbabwe gravely in 2017. It not only imposed a communist or one-party political philosophy on the people but redefined the Corporation of Power in Zimbabwe, transforming Zimbabwe’s almost in-existent democracy into a barracks democracy. It placed private interests over general interests, setting the stage for further instability in Zimbabwe. Finally, it exploited the Constitution and the weaknesses

⁴⁶Baynham, S. 1992. “Civil-Military Relations in Post-Independent Africa”. **South African Defence Review**.

⁴⁷Williamson, J. 2010. “Seeking Civilian Control: Rule of Law, Democracy and Civil Military Relations in Zimbabwe”. **Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies. Article 12**, Vol. 17, No. 12, (p.395).

in popular coordination engineered over the years by the Corporation of Power to further deprive the electorate of its right to choose its President. It reduced the people from an already abusive role of only plebisciting the ZANU-PF's Mugabe over the years as seen in the rigging of the last three elections, to one of just proclaiming a new President.

The ascendency of Mnangagwa to the presidency may only represent a temporary setback for G40. The government seems to be afraid of the remnants of G40 scattered around the world. Government takes every opportunity to respond to tweets or interviews by G40 kingpin Professor Jonathan Moyo a former Higher Education Minister in Mugabe's government. With the regrouping of G40 to form a new political party called the New Patriotic Front (NPF), headache for the government is far from over. The new party has been the net effect of splitting votes during the ensuing harmonised elections that Mnangagwa has to win to legitimise his rule and probably wean himself from the military which seems to be the de facto leaders.

The coup also brought so much mistrust with the security sector. The military has in a way salvaged the police and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) for having the closest links to Mugabe and G40. A number of senior police officers and CIO operatives have been plagued since January 2018 with this stigma. General Constantino Chiwenga who led the coup before retirement and subsequent appointment as Vice-President of Zimbabwe was assigned the Defence, Security and War Veteran Ministry to specifically keep an eye on the security establishments and prevent any attempt to stage a coup against the government. The implication is that in the short to medium term, there will be no harmony within the security sector which could be a breeding place for yet another coup.

The country having been misgoverned for most of the 37 years under Mugabe's rule requires stability for economic development. The key to development in Zimbabwe are credible, free and fair elections. Mnangagwa's government should ensure the upcoming harmonised elections scheduled for 30 July 2018 are credible, free and fair so as to remove the country from the kind of electoral mode it has had since 2013 and for the international community to bring in the much-needed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and technology to retool industry thereby creating employment. However, will Mnangagwa eventually depart from the logic of power that guides the Corporation of Power or will he remain true to his nature as the croc?

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