

“Zimbabwe After Mugabe”
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and Int’l Organizations
Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman
February 28, 2018

Today’s hearing has been a long time in the making – for some 37 years since the birth of the modern nation of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe dominated the political landscape of this resource rich and promising country, first as Prime Minister, then as President, always as Strongman. It was a 37-year rule which, sadly, betrayed the post-colonial aspirations of freedom, one which was marked by misrule, mismanagement and mistreatment of Mugabe’s fellow citizens.

For many Zimbabweans, and for many years, envisioning a “Zimbabwe after Mugabe” was considered a fool’s errand. Elections – some more flawed than others – had come and gone, opportunities for reform fallen by the wayside, and through it all the domineering presence of one man haunted the dreams of his countrymen.

Then, in a matter of weeks, culminating last November, the landscape changed. The once-invincible ruler in October 2017 set into motion a series of events which left him not only ousted from the Zimbabwe National Union-Patriotic Front party, or ZANU-PF, but pushed off his presidential perch.

The drama began in earnest when Mugabe sought to prop up his wife Grace’s standing as his designated successor by ousting one of his two Vice Presidents, Emmerson Mnangagwa (MAN-an-GA-gua), presumably to elevate his wife to the position, while simultaneously moving against Mnangagwa’s allies in the government and in ZANU-PF, promoting a younger generation aligned with Grace.

Mnangagwa was part of an older faction in ZANU-PF, the generation that fought for liberation, with roots and strong connections in the military. As Rhodesian Bush War veterans and political survivors, Mnangagwa and his comrades could draw upon a reservoir of experience and cunning; they were not to be so easily pushed aside.

So while Mugabe sought to tighten the reigns of control in favor of his wife and her allies, the other Vice President and head of the Zimbabwe Defense Force, Constantino Chiwenga (**CHEE**-wen-ga), made a bold statement on November 13, saying in “matters of protecting our revolution, the military will not hesitate to step in.” This was declared “treasonous,” but before Chiwenga himself could be arrested, the Zimbabwe Defense Forces did in fact step in and confined the long-serving President to his quarters while taking control of key points around the country.

What followed were spontaneous popular demonstrations *against* Robert Mugabe, indicating that a spell had been broken. ZANU-PF convened a meeting which declared Mnangagwa (**MAN**-an-**GA**-gua) to be interim leader of the party, and in the face of impeachment proceedings against Mugabe, the 93-year-old President reluctantly stepped down, allowing Mnangagwa to assume the vacancy. This series of actions preserved a veneer of constitutional process, such that neither our country nor the African Union would label the events that took place a “coup;” indeed, if it were a coup, it was a popularly supported one, and one which subsequently received High Court ratification.

So where does that leave us? Who is Emmerson Mnangagwa, the man who was sworn in as Zimbabwe’s President on November 21?

Critics call him “the Crocodile,” and recall his role as Mugabe’s right-hand man and confidant, including during the brutal period in the early 1980s, when in

the newly independent nation Mugabe waged an internal campaign of repression against fellow revolutionary leader Joshua Nkomo (EN-**KOH**-MOE), killing thousands of ethnic minority Ndebele (EN-DAH-**BELL**-AY) followers of Nkomo. During this time, Mugabe was assisted by military advisors from East Germany and North Korea, and by his Minister of State Security, one Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Others, more charitably, admit that Mnangagwa was indeed once the Crocodile, but maintain that he has changed, undergoing a religious conversion to Evangelical Christianity. Indeed, his rhetoric since ascending to power has been reassuring, stating that he will restore democracy, rule of law, economic prosperity and trade while addressing endemic corruption. On the issue of land tenure, he said he would end the seizures of property that Mugabe had used to punish enemies and reward cronies, even restoring property to white farmers, whose previous stewardship of the land had once made Zimbabwe, like white-ruled Rhodesia before it, the breadbasket of southern Africa.

So we stand at a crossroads, perhaps facing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity where Zimbabwe can chart a new course. Yet one cannot be Pollyanna, nor disregard the wise words of Pete Townsend, who once sang “Meet the new Boss, same as the old Boss... We won’t get fooled again.”

On the issue of land seizures, for example, one notes that the newly-retired general and, as of December 28, 2017, the new Vice President, Constantino Chiwenga (**CHEE**-wen-ga) – who issued the QUOTE UNQUOTE “treasonous” challenge that led to Mugabe’s ouster – is alleged to be a beneficiary of Mugabe’s past largess with other people’s land. This is perhaps something which one of our witnesses today can help clarify.

Indeed, as we attempt to read the tea leaves and discern what the entrails portend, we will be assisted by a stellar panel. While the State Department is unable to send a witness due to the immediacy of issues concerning the budget and Secretary Tillerson's impending trip to Africa, we have with us a former Ambassador of the United States to Zimbabwe as well as one of the key implementers of our democracy promotion policy in Zimbabwe. We also have two Zimbabwean with us, who are extremely versed and involved in contemporary events in the country.

Today's hearing will look at the prospects for true democratic and governance reform, as well as the potential restoration of rule of law.

We truly hope that the arrival of a new government signals an opportunity for establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between the United States and Zimbabwe, and that as the near future unfolds, events will allow us to reevaluate some of the sanctions that were imposed during the Mugabe years.

With that I turn to our witnesses....