

## Will Mnangagwa pass the Litmus Test of Democratic Resolve?

by Nyasha Mcbride Mpani, Project Leader, IJR



President Emmerson Mnangagwa has been sworn into office three times in 6 years, and in his inauguration speeches in November 2017, August 2018, and September 2023, he promised radical reforms aimed at fostering 're-engagement'. His public relations team and state media make strenuous efforts to portray him as a reformist committed to expanding democratic freedoms for citizens whose bar had been atrociously lowered by his predecessor the late President Robert Mugabe. Under the Second Republic, Mnangagwa pledged to repeal oppressive Mugabe-era laws hindering press freedom and the right to protest, vowing to cultivate a culture of debate and contestation throughout Zimbabwean society. Despite these assurances, doubts loitered among Zimbabweans and international stakeholders regarding the sincerity of this 'new dispensation' and his capacity to alter the nation's course.

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However, following his victory in the 2023 elections, with his final term underway, discussions about extending his tenure to 2030 or seeking a third term have surfaced in the media, various quarters of the country and within his party Zanu-PF. Slogans and songs like "2030 ED Ane Achitonga" (2023 ED will be in charge) have begun circulating. At a recent silver jubilee ordination anniversary of Archbishop Robert Ndlovu of the Roman Catholic Church, the President even joked about ruling indefinitely, sparking speculation about his intentions.

While the constitution prohibits such extensions, in a country where the seemingly impossible becomes reality, one wonders which tactic the President might employ to prolong his rule given the fact that his party, Zanu Pf, now enjoys the majority in Parliament. This was necessitated after some recalls in the now fragmented and derelict opposition saw the seats being taken by Zanu Pf through bye-election victories. Will the President read from the Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé

playbook? Will he pass the democracy litmus test?

Given Zimbabwe's history, characterized by late President Mugabe's refusal to relinquish power until a military coup ousted him in 2017, one would expect President Mnangagwa to avoid repeating such mistakes. Breaking with the past also entails President Mnangagwa shunning term extensions or clinging to power beyond constitutional limits. Establishing a positive legacy should be his priority. There's no justification for flirting with the notion of a third term. While there may be calls from his family, close quarters or supporters for an extension, the President stands at a critical point in time where he must demonstrate his authenticity, leadership, and commitment to democratic principles. This is a time where his influence as a leader is important.

It is an opportunity for President Mnangagwa to prove to his supporters and the nation that leaders are temporary custodians of power. Following President Mugabe's disastrous prolonged tenure, President Mnangagwa has the chance to set a different precedent or trajectory by upholding term limits. This decision would elevate him, signalling a departure from the past and inculcating a new era of politics within his party and the nation. At a time when the opposition is weakened, such a move would strengthen ZANU-PF more and renew confidence in the country's political system.

While there may be other legacy projects such as the refurbishment of the Robert Mugabe airport and Beitbridge border post, the roadworks on the busy Harare-Beitbridge highway and the diplomatic juggernaut of having countries like Kenya scrap visa fees for Zimbabwean nationals while other SADC

countries are being made to pay attest to the work that President Mnangagwa has done, the decision to pass on the leadership button and not seek a third term would be a masterstroke. It would bring in a new kind of politics within his ruling party and the country, a feat which his political godfather Mugabe failed to achieve. This act would put Mnangagwa on a high pedestal, demonstrating that he has been considering the transition of power since assuming the presidency. In any case, he will be 86 years old, a milestone in a country where life expectancy for men is only 62 years. As the old adage says, a good dancer knows when to leave the dance floor.

Taking a cue from his Mozambican counterpart, President Filipe Nyusi, who recently oversaw a smooth transition within FRELIMO, President Mnangagwa has an opportunity to emulate such leadership. The recent appointment of 47-year-old Daniel Chapo as Presidential candidate and interim secretary-general, showcased a commitment to party principles and a smooth succession process. By observing this example, President Mnangagwa could demonstrate integrity and respect for democratic norms, which would steer Zimbabwe towards stability and democratic predictability. It is an opportunity for him to learn also from Senegal's now former President Macky Sall who also tried to extend his term limits through various nefarious tactics but later abandoned it when sanity prevailed. It's essential for the President to heed the voices of Zimbabweans, who according to Afrobarometer survey data, have overwhelmingly supported two-term limits over time since 2002. The data reflects the will of the people, and the voice of the people is the voice of God!

## Rwanda deploying another 2,500 soldiers to help Mozambique fight Cabo Delgado insurgency

by Charles Mangwiro, Senior Editor, Radio Mozambique



Rwanda is deploying an additional 2,500 soldiers to help Mozambique fight resurgent attacks by Islamic State insurgents in the oil-rich Cabo Delgado province. Attacks have been on the rise in the area as a force known as SAMIM, deployed by the Southern African Development Community, prepares to withdraw.

President Filipe Nyusi was quoted by state-run radio late Sunday as saying the troops are being deployed not because Mozambique cannot ensure its own defense, but because the country cannot fight terrorism alone.

Nyusi, who is due to step down in January 2025 at the end of his second five-year term, said it is clear that Rwanda is cooperating with Mozambique, adding that his greatest pride would be to leave things well done to ensure continuity. He said more contingents are disembarking, not to exchange, but to add flow. And this is mainly because of the departure of SAMIM, and when it definitively leaves the hotspot area we will occupy it. Nyusi made the statement during a review of the visit he made to Rwanda's capital last week.

He was in Kigali to attend the Africa CEO forum, and he seized the opportunity to meet with his Rwandan counterpart, Paul Kagame, and the chief executive officer of French company TotalEnergies, Patrick Pouyanné.

Cabo Delgado has been facing an armed insurgency since 2017 that has disrupted several multi-billion oil and natural gas projects. Three years ago, Rwanda deployed 1,000 soldiers to fight alongside Mozambique's armed defense and was joined by SAMIM.

The regional intervention force will completely withdraw in July, forcing the Mozambican Armed Defense Forces (FADM) to fill the security vacuum.

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Rwanda's additional military support to Mozambique was welcomed by TotalEnergies Chief Pouyanné, who said the natural gas project district will soon resume. "I believe we have progressed very positively with contractors, and from this point of view we are ready to resume. We are also working with all the credit agencies to resume the financing of the project and it's progressing very well," Pouyanné said.

ExxonMobil, with partner Eni, is also developing a liquified natural gas project in northern Mozambique and said last week it was "optimistic and looking forward" for the security situation to improve.

SAMIM's withdrawal from Mozambique, the result of financial difficulties, comes at a time when terrorist attacks have increased in Cabo Delgado. A week ago, Islamic State-backed insurgents ransacked the major town of Macomia in Cabo Delgado province following a dawn assault in which over 20 soldiers may have been killed, according to local media reports.

A senior project leader for South Africa-based Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, Dr Webster Zambara, said SADC should reconsider its withdrawal. "Actually it's the first time in Southern Africa where we would have a troop from east Africa stationed in one country to fight a war that actually is affecting not only one country Mozambique, but others like Tanzania, also Malawi and probably the whole region, and the bigger picture is that terrorism issues tend to be very long if we are to look at al-Shabab in East Africa and also Boko Haram in West Africa, so we may actually need to see SADC revisiting its position on this," said Zambara.

Last month, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), issued an appeal for almost half a billion dollars in emergency aid to support affected and displaced Mozambicans in Cabo Delgado. The humanitarian crisis there has left 1.3 million people needing humanitarian aid.

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