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By Dr. Alexander Noyes

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Dr. Alexander Noyes is an Adjunct Research Staff Member in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.



In this February 11, 2018, file photo, Cyril Ramaphosa delivers a speech at the Grand Parade in Cape Town, South Africa. (Source: AP Photo.)

ZIMBABWE—NEW PRESIDENT'S FIRST 100 DAYS

By George F. Ward

As Emmerson Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe's president, completes his first 100 days in office, he may find both reason for satisfaction and cause for concern. The new president has maintained his position within the ruling Zimbabwe African Peoples Union – Popular Front (ZANU-PF), signaled policy changes that could foster economic revival, and reached out with apparent success to international partners. Looking toward elections this summer, he stands to benefit from fissures within the political opposition. Nevertheless, Mnangagwa faces challenges. Chief among these are the prominent role of the military in government and the question of whether the upcoming elections will be judged by international observers as free and fair. The roles played by former President Robert Mugabe and former first lady Grace Mugabe and their allies may also be grounds for concern. [more...](#)



Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa, center, talks to the press after paying his respects to the family of Morgan Tsvangirai, in Harare, Sunday, February 18, 2018. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Background

Ramaphosa, a former labor leader, was rumored to be Nelson Mandela's [preferred choice](#) for deputy president when Mandela became South Africa's first president after the end of apartheid. (Thabo Mbeki was chosen for the post.) In the late 1990s, Ramaphosa went into the business world but maintained close ties with the ANC. As a businessman, he became one of the [wealthiest](#) people in Africa. He made a return to politics in 2012, when he assumed the position of deputy president of the ANC. Ramaphosa defeated Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Zuma's preferred successor and ex-wife, at the ANC's National Conference in December 2017.

Zuma versus Ramaphosa

As highlighted in [Africa Watch](#), over his nine-year presidency Zuma was implicated in variety of corruption cases and other political scandals and survived eight previous no-confidence votes in parliament. After Ramaphosa's victory in December, he and his allies in the ANC pressured Zuma to leave office early, in an effort to reverse the party's slumping political support in the run-up to [elections](#) scheduled for 2019. Over the past several years, the ANC has lost major cities to the opposition in local elections, including Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Mandela Bay. Zuma refused to stand down until it became clear that he would lose a looming no-confidence vote scheduled for mid-February. In his resignation speech, Zuma [admitted](#) that he had not been "the epitome of perfection" but made it clear that he disagreed with the decision of the party to recall him: "Even though I disagree with the decision of the leadership of my organization, I have always been a disciplined member of the ANC."

Ramaphosa claims to be a pro-business reformer who will clean up the ANC from within. He opened his recent State of the Nation speech by promising a [new dawn](#) for South Africa, claiming he will tackle South Africa's rampant corruption, referred to as "state capture." Attempting to chart a new direction for the party and the country, in his speech Ramaphosa [promised immediate action](#): "This is the year in which we will turn the tide of corruption in our public institutions." He added, "We are determined to build a society defined by decency and integrity that does not tolerate the plunder of public resources, nor the theft by corporate criminals of the hard-earned savings of ordinary people."

A Compromise Cabinet

On February 26, Ramaphosa announced his new cabinet, which he [described](#) as "transitional." The cabinet included both a number of well-reputed technocrats and some Zuma allies. Nhlanhla Nene, a widely respected former finance minister who was sacked by Zuma in 2015, returned to that post. Pravin Gordhan, who also enjoys a solid reputation, takes over the Ministry of Public Enterprises. But Ramaphosa's selection for deputy president of David Mabuza, a Zuma ally who has faced allegations



In this February 11, 2018, file photo, Cyril Ramaphosa delivers a speech at the Grand Parade in Cape Town, South Africa. (Source: AP Photo.)

of corruption, has drawn [criticism](#). Ramaphosa also gave the ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation to Dlamini-Zuma, his former rival and Zuma's preferred successor. Announcing his cabinet, Ramaphosa [said](#): "In making these changes, I have been conscious of the need to balance continuity and stability with the need for renewal, economic recovery and accelerated transformation."

Mmusi Maimane, the leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance, strongly [disagreed](#) with the cabinet choices: "The cabinet remains filled with compromised ministers." He went on to [say](#) that Ramaphosa "is beholden to the very ANC factions that protected Jacob Zuma for a decade, and brought our country and the economy to its knees."

Conclusion

Having attained the presidency, Ramaphosa faces a delicate balancing act in seeking to placate competing factions in the ANC. Ramaphosa won only [52 percent](#) of the ANC's vote in December, and Zuma loyalists are still in powerful positions within the party leadership. Ramaphosa's cabinet picks suggest that he will remain beholden to Zuma-aligned interests while attempting to implement his change agenda and reshape the ANC's sinking political fortunes. The pick of Mabuza has garnered the most criticism. Indeed, Ralph Mathekga, a South African analyst, [asked](#), "How can Ramaphosa claim to be anti-corruption when he is standing next to such a morally compromised figure as David Mabuza?" Time will tell if Ramaphosa will be able to thread the needle between implementing change while simultaneously appeasing the Zuma faction of the ANC. If he is able to win presidential elections in 2019, which seems likely despite flagging ANC support, he will be better placed to fully implement his agenda.

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Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa, center, talks to the press after paying his respects to the family of Morgan Tsvangirai, in Harare, Sunday, February 18, 2018. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

Davos Man

The [World Economic Forum](#), which convenes annually in Davos, Switzerland, bills itself as engaging “the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.” So it was a meaningful gesture when President Mnangagwa flew to Davos and [proclaimed](#), “Zimbabwe is open for business.” He said that “trade and economics would be my priority . . . rather than politics, in order to catch up with the region.”

Returning home, Mnangagwa continued his focus on bolstering both international and domestic business confidence. On January 31, 2018, his government announced that white farmers would, like their black counterparts, be eligible for [99-year land leases](#). Up to now, the 400 white farmers remaining in Zimbabwe after the eviction of more than 4,000 were issued only five-year renewable land leases. In addition, the government is considering establishing a special tribunal to consider compensation for expropriated white farmers. Even as daunting economic challenges remain, the government’s 2018 budget, which emphasizes fiscal rebalancing, restructuring of state-owned companies, a sustainable debt strategy, and international re-engagement, has received [positive reviews](#).

Foreign Reaction Positive

Mnangagwa’s approach has garnered international support. *Africa Watch* previously [reported](#) that China had provided a significant credit facility. The European Union (EU) has also welcomed Mnangagwa’s efforts. On January 22, the EU Council adopted a set of [conclusions](#) regarding the political transition in Zimbabwe, including:

- Its availability to engage with the new Zimbabwean government and civil society in a structured political dialogue;
- An offer to favorably consider electoral observation, providing that the Zimbabwean government issues an invitation and the conditions are in place for a peaceful, inclusive, credible, and transparent election;
- Its affirmation of willingness to support the planning and implementation of needed economic structural changes and reform;
- Its support for the establishment of constructive re-engagement by Zimbabwe with the international financial institutions based on a clear program of political and economic reform.

More recently, others have moved to support Zimbabwe. The South African government has facilitated the transfer of rolling stock needed for the revitalization of the Zimbabwean rail network. This transaction was presented as emblematic of the [South African commitment](#) to strengthening economic ties with Zimbabwe. The African Union pledged to provide

financial and technical assistance to help ensure [credible elections](#) this year. Finally, the new government in Harare hosted its second high-level visitor from the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office since coming to power. Harriett Baldwin, the newly appointed minister for Africa, arrived at the end of January for [wide-ranging talks](#) on "issues relating to re-engagement with the international community and macro-economic stabilization."

A Divided Political Opposition

As he looks toward the elections, President Mnangagwa faces an opposition that remains divided despite attempts at coalition building. The death from cancer on February 14 of Morgan Tsvangirai, the iconic leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T), left that party without a strong leader. A party leadership body's designation of [Nelson Chamisa](#) as acting president of the party is contested.

The National People's Party (NPP), led by Joice Mujuru, a former vice president purged from the ZANU-PF by Mugabe in 2014, is riddled with factionalism and divisions. With the fall of Mugabe, some NPP leaders have reportedly [rejoined](#) the ZANU-PF. During her three years in opposition, Mujuru has not been able to consolidate her power, and she is unlikely to do so in the short time available before elections.

ZANU-PF Still the Key

The political bottom line may be that the principal threat to Mnangagwa's tenure as president will not come from the opposition; possible threats within the ZANU-PF may be of greater concern to the new president. Vice President Constantino Chiwenga, the former army chief who engineered the ouster of Mugabe, has assumed a high profile, acting like the strongman he may aspire to be. He caused a [storm](#) in parliament with personal attacks on opposition legislators. In a speech on February 17, Chiwenga took a tough line even in urging [peaceful elections](#), saying that "there shall be no fighting and we shall all agree that who does not abide by that must be chastised by the society." NPP leader Mujuru has alleged that [thousands](#) of military personnel are already engaged in electoral campaigning for the ZANU-PF. [Press reports](#), persistent but unsubstantiated, speak of tensions and mistrust within the government over Chiwenga's role.

Another intra-party concern for Mnangagwa is the continuing effort by the defeated G40 faction within the ZANU-PF to discredit the new president. [Patrick Zhuwao](#), a nephew of the former president, appears to be leading the G40 effort from exile in South Africa. G40 leaders have reportedly formed a new political party, the New Patriot Front, which has [petitioned](#) both the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to renounce the takeover by the Zimbabwe military in November 2017 as illegal.

Perhaps the most interesting of recent developments within the ZANU-PF is a [reported speech](#) delivered on February 24 to friends and supporters by former President Mugabe at a private 94th birthday celebration. In his address, Mugabe complained of slights delivered by the new government (withdrawal of vehicles and staff), but also denounced the November 2017 military intervention as "illegal and detrimental to democracy." Mugabe reportedly said that he had requested an urgent meeting with Mnangagwa and that the latter had agreed to meet after returning from his current visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. If this report is correct, it would appear that Mugabe, despite his [dependence](#) on the Mnangagwa government for his lavish retirement package, feels emboldened enough to criticize his successor.

Conclusion

In the complicated game of Zimbabwean politics, President Mnangagwa still has a decent hand to play. He heads both the government and the ruling party, and he is likely to win an election held in 2018, if only because of the weakness of the opposition. On the other hand, his position is less than fully secure. Unlike former President Mugabe, who regularly fired his vice presidents, Mnangagwa has, in Chiwenga, a deputy to whom he is beholden and whom he cannot purge. As Mnangagwa moves to address Zimbabwe's urgent economic problems, he will need to be careful to do so without endangering the considerable commercial and financial interests of the military leaders who put him in office. This is a challenge on which President Mnangagwa's fate may hang.

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