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By George F. Ward, Jr.

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Emmerson Mnangagwa, president of Zimbabwe attends the opening session of the World Economic Forum, WEF, in Davos, Switzerland, Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2018. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

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Filipe Nyusi reacts after being sworn in as newly-elected Mozambican president in Maputo, Thursday, Jan. 15, 2015. Nyusi, a former defense minister, won the post in Oct. 15 elections that saw the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, or Frelimo, retain its parliamentary majority. AP Photo/Ferhat Momade/AP

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

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## Managing the Ruling Party

Mnangagwa has solidified his leadership of the ZANU-PF. He provided former President Robert Mugabe with an ample [retirement package](#) that includes a retirement bonus, an official residence, a large staff, a fleet of cars, and private air travel. The package pays tribute to Mugabe, who is still revered by many as the father of Zimbabwe, while giving both the former president and his wife incentives not to engage in intra-party intrigues.

Within the party and the government, Mnangagwa has moved skillfully. Using his campaign against corruption as justification, he purged leaders of the G-40 faction that had coalesced around Grace Mugabe. Initially, only two former ministers were [arrested](#) and charged with corruption. Other arrests followed, but fewer than might have been expected. In fact, only three of the 22 members of the last Mugabe government cabinet were [excluded](#) from Mnangagwa's cabinet.

Mnangagwa has also had to accept an increased political role for the military as the price of power. He has given senior military leaders prominent roles in government. He initially [named](#) as ministers two senior military officers. General Sibusiso Moyo, who had served as spokesman for the armed forces during the military intervention, became foreign minister. Air Force chief Perrance Shiri, who commanded forces involved in the so-called Gukuruhundi massacre in 1983, was named minister of lands, agriculture, and rural resettlement. More importantly, following the ZANU-PF congress in December 2017 Mnangagwa named the former chief of the Zimbabwe Defense Force (ZDF), Constantino Chiwenga, as vice president of both Zimbabwe and the ZANU-PF and as minister of defense. Chiwenga, who planned and orchestrated the military intervention in November 2017, is seen as Mnangagwa's heir apparent.

## Support of the Security Services

With the support of the military, Mnangagwa has addressed issues of loyalty on the other two sides of Zimbabwe's security triangle – the police and intelligence service. Both the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) were [viewed](#) by the military as supporting the G40 faction during the November 2017 events. Indeed, the police had planned to [arrest](#) General Chiwenga on his return to Zimbabwe from his visit to Beijing in early November 2017. Military forces thwarted that plan. The police commissioner was placed under house arrest. He was brought in to witness Mnangagwa's inauguration and was [loudly booed](#) as he sheepishly pledged allegiance to the new president. The commissioner was later [fired](#). When the police returned to service after a five-week suspension, their patrols were accompanied by soldiers of the ZDF, leaving little doubt of who was in charge. Most recently, the government carried out more wholesale changes, retiring [30 senior police officials](#).



The situation at the CIO seems less clear. Isaac Moyo, the former Zimbabwean ambassador to South Africa and veteran ZANU-PF leader, has been brought in as director. Whether Moyo will be able to transform the organization into one responsive to the new president is an open question. The fact that Moyo's deputy, Nixon Chiranda, died on December 30, 2017, in a car accident that has been characterized as "[suspicious](#)" adds an element of doubt.

## Dealing with the Economy

Turning Zimbabwe's troubled economy around may become Mnangagwa's toughest test. He has made positive pledges – openness to outside partners, commitment to root out corruption, willingness to modify the much-criticized "indigenization" statute (requiring 51 percent Zimbabwean control of enterprises), compensation for expropriated farmers, and reduction of government expenditures. He touched on all of these themes in a wide-ranging [interview](#) with the *Financial Times* on January 16, 2018.

In response, Zimbabwe's partners have been forthcoming. [China](#) provided a loan of \$153 million. In the *Financial Times* interview, Mnangagwa stated that the African Export-Import Bank had agreed to provide a \$1.5 billion credit facility. He claimed to see a "green light" from most western countries, including Britain, Germany, Spain, and France. (Mnangagwa omitted mention of the United States during his two-hour interview.) A few days after the interview, Mnangagwa flew off to Davos, Switzerland at the head of a large delegation to the World Economic Forum. Before departure, he [said](#), "I am going there to learn what is happening and to talk about my country that it is open for business."

Mnangagwa's problem is that if he is sincere in his fulfilling his economic pledges, he will need to take on deeply rooted ZANU-PF interests. Corruption and bloated government payrolls have been major buttresses of ZANU-PF rule. Party and defense force leaders have benefited from land expropriation and the indigenization laws. If he loses party and ZDF support, he will not long remain in power.

## Staying in Power

Although Mnangagwa ruled out sharing power in his government with the political opposition, he has [promised](#) "free, credible, fair, and indisputable" elections in "four to five months." In the *Financial Times* interview, he said that he would be willing to admit electoral observers from the United Nations, the European Union, and, perhaps, the Commonwealth.

Looking toward the elections, the ZANU-PF remains in a commanding political position. Although the ZANU-PF and the ZDF would likely use force if necessary to achieve a positive electoral outcome, according to some observers it is "[possible, and even probable](#)," that Mnangagwa could win a free and fair election. Opposition leaders have papered over their divisions to form a coalition. But the leader of that coalition, Morgan Tsvangirai, is hardly a new face and is suffering from cancer, and internal divisions within the MDC remain. Joice Mujuru, who formed an opposition party after her ouster by Mugabe from her role as vice president, has never succeeded in solidifying her role, and many of her supporters may be tempted to rejoin the ZANU-PF. Although some in the ZANU-PF reportedly favor [delay](#) in holding elections, it is understandable that Mnangagwa may welcome a poll, and the sooner the better.

## Conclusion

So far, Mnangagwa must be given credit for a positive start, but it is only a start. He has consolidated his grip on power, and he has made pledges regarding economic and public sector reform. In return, China, South Africa, and some western countries have signaled support. The elections will be the litmus test. If Mnangagwa wins, as is likely, and outside observers are able to characterize the poll as free and fair (and the bar may be set fairly low) then he will have a mandate and freer hand to deal with issues, such as corruption and government bloat, that engage core ZANU-PF interests. As uncertain as this outlook is, it is better than past prospects, which meant for Zimbabwe only more of the same misery and misrule.

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On January 13, 2018, an attack on a government building in Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique [killed](#) five and injured eleven. Two days later, another [attack](#) on a medical center in Palma, located in the same region, left two dead. The government of Mozambique has been engaged in a number of [skirmishes](#) with a local Islamist extremist group since an attack in October 2017 killed 16 in Mocimboa da Praia, also in the north. While the government has not confirmed that the same group, referred to as “Al-Shabaabs,” is behind the latest attacks, it is the main suspect and locals are convinced that the group is responsible. Are these isolated incidents? Or is there an emerging extremist threat in Mozambique?

## Background

Mozambique is a [low-income](#) country located in southern Africa with a population of 28 million. President Filipe Nyusi heads the ruling FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) party, which has been in power since 1994. Afonso Dhlakama leads the main opposition party, RENAMO (*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*). FRELIMO and RENAMO, which fought a long and brutal civil war that ended in 1992, relapsed into a low-level conflict in 2013 but agreed to a [ceasefire](#) in May 2017. Despite a long history of political conflict, the country has avoided the type of violent Islamic extremism that West and East Africa have experienced. The October attack was Mozambique’s [first](#) experience with violent Islamist extremism. Mozambique’s largest religious [population](#) is Catholic, at 28 percent. The country’s second largest religious group is Muslim, at 18 percent, and the rest are Zionist Christian, Protestant, other, or non-religious.

## Spate of Attacks over Past Three Months

The Islamist group thought to be behind the recent attacks is known as [Ansar al-Sunna](#) (Defenders of Tradition), but locals call the group “Al-Shabaabs.” Despite the moniker, the group does not appear to have any clear links to Somalia’s al-Shabaab extremist group. However, the area where violence has taken place is located close to Mozambique’s northern border with Tanzania, and the group is believed to [consist](#) of Mozambicans, Tanzanians, Somalis, and Sudanese, some of who have been [schooled](#) in Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The group wants the imposition of Sharia law and the removal of their children from the national education system. They [reportedly](#) refer to traditional Muslim preachers in the area as “kafir,” meaning “unbeliever.”

Since the October 2017 attack, the extremist group has launched a spate of raids in the north of the country. These include an attack in November in which over [30 houses](#) and shops were set on fire, another attack that left two dead and a church destroyed, and a December [attack](#) that left a police officer dead and five others injured. Given the previous lack of Islamist violence in Mozambique, the recent attacks have surprised many in Mozambique. [According](#) to the Institute for Security Studies, the series of attacks has: “caused shock and bewilderment in the country and the region.” The insecurity has the potential to impact global economic engagement. Both Eni SpA, an Italian oil and gas company, and the Texas-based Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, have gas projects in the region. In June 2017 Eni SpA started construction on a \$7 billion gas [project](#) on the coast. Anadarko reportedly [evacuated](#) personnel after the October attack.



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## Government and Regional Response

The Mozambican government has reacted swiftly and forcefully to the threat. They have arrested [300 suspects](#) since the October attack, including the arrest last week of 24 who were traveling from Nampula, located south of the attacks, to Mocimboa da Praia. [According](#) to police spokesman Inacio Dina, the 24 suspects were likely “going to Mocimboa da Praia to reinforce the insurgents that are creating panic since October of last year.”

In addition to the arrests, the government has also taken more forceful action. Following the attack on police on December 23 and 24, the government used two helicopters and a navy ship to [shell](#) the village of Mitumbate—which the government views as an Islamist base—leading to 50 casualties. In response to the January attacks, Dina [announced](#): “Defence and Security Forces are on the ground, pursuing the group. . . . They intend to arrest the attackers, hold them responsible for their acts, and recover the stolen property.” Last week, the Mozambican and Tanzanian governments signed a memorandum of understanding to [jointly fight](#) crime and terrorists in the border region. This will allow both countries to launch a combined response to the extremist threat.

The government has also shuttered three mosques in the area and offered an [amnesty](#) period for extremists to come forward on their own accord, which expired in December 2017. Local Muslim groups have [condemned](#) the attacks and asked extremists to turn themselves in. Abdul Assane, of the Islamic Council, a religious association, [said](#) that extremists must, “be held accountable for the crimes they have committed. If they had been good people, they should have given themselves up.”

## Conclusion

While the threat of violent extremism in Mozambique is currently relatively small scale and contained to the north, the array of attacks attributed to Islamist extremists over the past three months suggests that the incidents are not isolated and that the emerging threat should be taken seriously. The available evidence suggests that the threat at the moment is domestically driven and not linked to international extremists. But if the government response is handled in a heavy-handed fashion, the threat could metastasize. Indeed, a 2017 United Nations Development Program report, drawing on interviews with former extremists in Africa—mostly from Somalia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Sudan—found that government repression was the primary tipping point pushing individuals to join extremist groups. The [report](#) found that “a striking 71 percent pointed to ‘government action,’ including ‘killing of a family member or friend’ or ‘arrest of a family member or friend,’ as the incident that prompted them to join.”

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