

Mugabe: How Much Longer?

Written by Stephen Chan

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Mugabe: How Much Longer?

<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/01/19/mugabe-how-much-longer/>

STEPHEN CHAN, JAN 19 2012

Robert Mugabe is now aged and reputedly ill, though benefiting from extensive international medical interventions – largely from Singapore and Malaysia. His Central Intelligence Organisation is an extremely efficient secret service benefiting from extensive training and international liaisons – including from Iran, Israel, India, Japan and China. The internationalism is vast and hardly befits those of a pariah, and comprises those the West would deem both friend and foe.

His regime is hardly on its last legs and not threatened beyond key points. Mugabe is strong enough to intimidate the most senior of his ambitious colleagues and there are many who trace the death in 2011 of Solomon Mujuru to his door. Mujuru had been his wartime comrade and commander of the guerilla armies. Without him, Mugabe would never have become President. But Mujuru, it was reported, wanted elections delayed till 2013 to give the Mugabe party, ZANU-PF, time to find a successor – younger and more technocratic and more pragmatic towards the West. Mujuru, in this scenario, looked to the future with his party vouchsafed and in good hands for a post-Mugabe era. Specialist wings around Mugabe ensured his elimination.

But the idea that an eminent part of the party envisaged life beyond Mugabe has been enough to stir the policy cells of Western Governments. For a long time now the quarrel between the West with Mugabe has been exactly that: drawing from the immense personal dislike between Mugabe and Tony Blair, it has been a personalised battle. The prospect of a post-Mugabe future, if not in 2013 but shortly after – because, surely, even with extraordinary medical support, the man cannot be immortal – has led Western policy slowly to entertain a place for ZANU-PF within visions of what is to come.

This is also partly to do with the poor performance of the erstwhile opposition leader, now Prime Minister in an inchoate, ill-tempered and ill-mannered but surprisingly enduring coalition. Morgan Tsvangirai was a brilliant, charismatic and courageous opposition leader but has shown a less than deft touch as a policy-maker, as a leader of parliamentary forces, and as someone able to roll back the excesses of the Mugabe era. To be sure, ZANU-PF has harassed him every inch of the way, extracting all the best out of his people and his capacities – such as stabilising the economy – and ensuring no real policy reform beyond that point. But the struggle has highlighted how much organisational expertise ZANU-PF still has at its command, and how ill-formed Tsvangirai's MDC party still is in its organisational and political capacity. And there is no doubt that MDC Members of Parliament have learnt as many corrupt tricks as ZANU-PF ones, so who is what, and what who stands for is now clouded.

Basically, the West will soon be envisaging a future of continuing coalition governments in Zimbabwe. The West would like to see, after somewhat freer elections than the last one, a greater MDC control of government and preferably an MDC President of Zimbabwe. But the continuing presence of quite a strong ZANU-PF contingent in both Parliament and Government would neither alarm the West any more, nor do anything but encourage the reform and rebirth of ZANU-PF as a modern nationalist party – not the backwards-looking antiquarian fossil that Mugabe has tried so hard to turn it into.

The joker in the pack is, as ever, Mugabe. If he successfully calls elections for 2012, and brazenly thumps his way to a victory, then the future is postponed. His party will discover on his deathbed that there never was an immortality for either the President nor an unchanged party. A changed ZANU-PF has a future. An unchanged one does not.

Mugabe: How Much Longer?

Written by Stephen Chan

Solomon Mujuru was right, and he paid for that with his life. Other lives are coming to their ends. Who pays what and for how long after are key questions – but both pipers and undertakers have their asking prices.

—

Stephen Chan is Dean at London's School of Oriental & African Studies. His latest book is *Southern Africa: Old Treacheries and New Deceits*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

About the author:

Stephen Chan OBE was Foundation Dean of Law and Social Sciences at SOAS University of London, where he remains as Professor of World Politics. He has occupied many named chairs around the world, most recently the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Chair of Academic Excellence at Bir Zeit University in 2015, and the George Soros Chair of Public Policy at the Central European University in 2016. He was the 2010 International Studies Association Eminent Scholar in Global Development. As an international civil servant he helped pioneer modern electoral observation in Zimbabwe in 1980, worked in many post-conflict zones – where 'post' was a largely fictional if politic appellation – and continues to be seconded to many diplomatic initiatives around the world today. He is the author of *Meditations on Diplomacy: Comparative Cases in Diplomatic Practice and Foreign Policy* (2017).