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# **The Continent**

*with* **Mail & Guardian**



**EXCLUSIVE**

**Are American  
commandos  
operating in  
your country?**

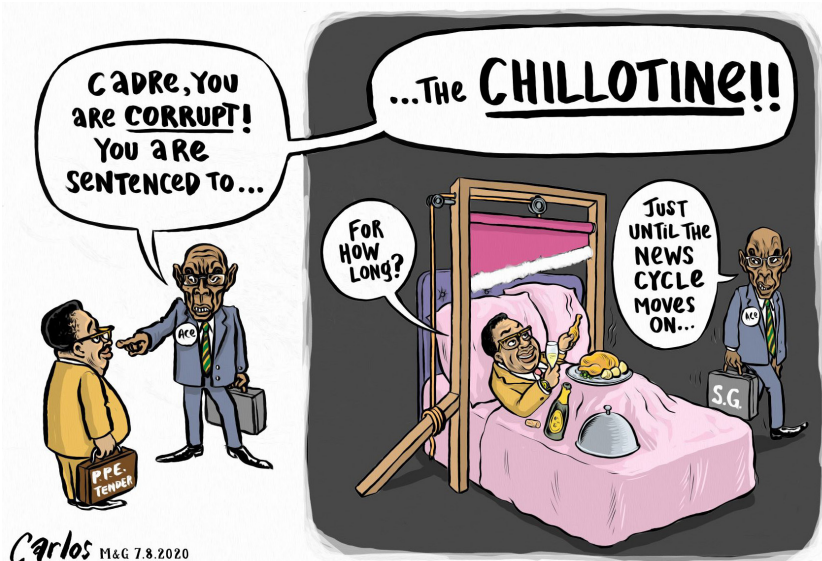
Photo: AFRICOM

# Inside:

- **COVER STORY:** Inside the secret world of US commandos in Africa (p20)
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- **Investigation:** How dodgy arms dealers skimmed \$137-million from Niger's budget (p29)

## Breaking the language barrier

This week, *The Continent* is publishing our first story in a language that is not a colonial import. We've translated Ranga Mberi's powerful essay on Hopewell Chin'ono's imprisonment into Shona, to make it more accessible for our Zimbabwean audience. (Ndebele speakers, we haven't forgotten about you – we're working on it, promise!) Expect to see more languages reflected in these pages in the coming months.



**Putting the con in consequences:** Ace Magashule, secretary-general of South Africa's ruling African National Congress party, has been criticised for failing to take action against party members implicated in Covid-related corruption.

# In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

## Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea

Uganda's ruling party has endorsed President Yoweri Museveni as its candidate for next year's election. Should he win, this would be the 75-year-old's sixth term.

Meanwhile, the prez has released a workout video in which he drops for no fewer than 40 push-ups. While he may not want to *step* down, he does seem keen to *get* down. And if that doesn't see him re-elected, he can always just blame it on the boogie.

Over in Guinea, the ruling party has called on President Alpha Condé to seek the burden of power for a third time. Ever so coy, Condé has "taken note" of their wishes. Far be it for him to deny his country a presidential hat trick, right?

Which brings us to Côte d'Ivoire. Following the death of Amadou Gon Coulibaly, prime minister and the president's designated successor, debate has raged over who could fill his shoes. After much soul-searching, beard-stroking and back-scratching, the ruling RHDP party has decided the man to replace the man meant to replace President Alassane Ouattara is none other than...President Alassane Ouattara.

Ouattara had no option but to accept,



**Fit for office: A screengrab from President Museveni's latest home exercise video**

with the modesty and grace expected of a foregone conclusion.

It is said imitation is the best form of flattery. If truly that is the case then all that is left to determine is whether Condé, Ouattara and Museveni are imitating each other – or just flattering themselves.

## Chad

If you're a switched-on government,

social media can be like a flattery battery. All those likes and faves, charging you up. But then the trolls descend, with their draining demands for “accountability” and “human rights”. It can really get you down!

The only thing to do is take a break for a while, flick that internet off-switch, and delete social media. From the entire country.

Ethiopia, Mali and Somalia have all made forays into state-sponsored serenity this year, but nobody shuts it all down like Chad’s President Idriss Déby who last year emerged from his country’s 16-month internet shutdown looking positively rejuvenated.

In fact, his government just announced another internet slowdown to curb “hate speech”. Haters are gonna hate, but must they do it while the president is trying to relax?

## Tanzania and Zimbabwe

Other nations prefer a bureaucratic approach. Tanzania, for example, is ordering bloggers and online publishers to apply for a licence to operate. Even then, they can’t post calls for protests, “content that causes annoyance” or information about contagious diseases, without approval.

Not to be left out, Zimbabwe is seeking inner peace by asserting new boundaries. According to the minister of women’s affairs, Sithembiso Nyoni, the government wants to criminalise “campaigning against one’s country”. Funnily enough, her announcement came just as #zimbabweanlivesmatter

was trending.

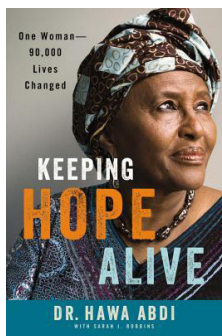
Perhaps Zimbabwe’s move isn’t so much a flattering imitation of other countries as it is a simple copy & paste. “Control+C” and “Control+V” are handy shortcuts, after all. But maybe it’s about time that President Emerson Mnangagwa tries hitting “Control+Z”.

## Somalia

Before getting too bleak about our continent’s lack of originality, we should take a moment for our own mental health, and recall that genuinely positive actions can be emulated and paid forward, too.

So let us remember Dr Hawa Abdi Dhiblawe, the Somali human rights activist and Nobel peace prize nominee who sadly passed away this week. Among her many achievements, Mama Hawa provided healthcare, education and shelter for thousands of women in Somalia through her foundation.

With her life and work as inspiration, let our aspiration be to leave the world healthier, happier, safer and freer than we found it. ■



**Legacy:**  
The auto-  
biography of  
the late Dr  
Hawa Abdi  
was published  
in 2013

# The Week in Numbers



(Photo: Andrew White/Parkwood Entertainment)

## 50

The number of African countries in which it is possible to stream (via DSTv) Beyoncé's new visual album, *Black is King*, contrary to social media speculation. The album is supposed to be a celebration of black history and African traditions.

## 6

The number of Togolese opposition activists whose mobile phones were targeted by spyware. Targets included the president of the Togolese Bishops' Conference, Benoit Alowonou. Although it's not clear who is behind the hack, a spokesperson for the opposition coalition said "we are in a police state that uses and abuses espionage against its own citizens".

## 10

The number of African countries that between them account for 80% of all Covid-19 testing taking place on the continent. South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Morocco, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Mauritius have all conducted more than 200,000 tests, according to Africa CDC.

## \$2 million

The value of a 2kg tanzanite gemstone discovered by Saninu Laizer, an artisanal miner in Tanzania. This is the third gemstone valued at more than \$1 million that Laizer has found in the last month. How did he get so lucky? We're not sure – but we'll try to send a reporter to find out.

## 3

The number of Cabinet ministers in the Gambia who have recently tested positive for Covid-19 – just days after President Adama Barrow went into self-isolation. Vice President Isatou Touray has also tested positive for the virus.

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# Nigeria



(Photo: Aminu Abubakar/AFP)

## Shoprite admits defeat

### PHOTO STORY

**A**fter 15 years in Nigeria, South African supermarket giant Shoprite announced this week that it plans to exit Africa's largest economy. Despite impressive growth at times, the company has struggled with supply-chain disruptions, and with difficulties in getting money out of the country – exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is the latest in a long line of major South African companies – including

Woolworths, Truworths and Mr Price – that have tried and ultimately failed to crack the Nigerian market.

“But the supermarket chain's exit, as such a prominent investor in the country, sends a strong signal that Nigeria is a tough place to do business, which the authorities need to take seriously for local companies as much as for foreign investors,” said Dianna Games, the executive director of the SA-Nigeria Business Chamber, in a column for *Business Day*. ■

# Cameroon

## Tomato industry left rotting on the vine

**Cameroon usually exports 10,000 tonnes of tomatoes each year. But Covid-19 restrictions have made that impossible – and farmers are already suffering the consequences**

**Daniel Ekonde**

**H**ervé Kouamo used to sell his tomatoes at the local market. Now he moves his harvest from door to door, searching for potential buyers. His town, Bangangté in Cameroon's West region, is flooded with fruit in markets and clients are overwhelmed.

"That's the only option if I have to get at least half of the money I spent to cultivate this crop. More truckloads of tomatoes come to markets here every day," 34-year-old Kouamo, who started harvesting the crop three years ago, told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Kouamo's customers used to come from Cameroon's big cities: Bamenda, Douala and Yaoundé, and bought in large quantities. Now, things have taken a turn since the Central African nation's borders were closed in an attempt to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

"I used to sell about 30 baskets in a day – each for 5,000 to 6,000 francs [about \$9

to \$10]. Now I sell a basket at 1,500 francs [about \$3] and rarely at 2,000 [about \$3.5]," Kouamo revealed.

According to Cameroon's state broadcaster CRTV, about 877,000 tonnes of tomatoes are produced yearly – mostly in the country's west, northwest, southwest, central and far north regions, as well as the Adamawa region – and a huge chunk is exported.

Cameroon's decision to close its borders in March meant its tomato producers could no longer access regional markets in west and central Africa, where the majority of the perishables go. Those markets include Nigeria, Gabon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Central African Republic.

"Nigerians paid us a lot for our tomatoes. They usually buy about 10,000 tonnes annually but now that channel has closed," Joseph Kana, a member of a tomato producers' association in the west region, told CRTV.

At least two tomato farmers have died





**Throwing nightshade: The closure of borders because of the Covid-19 pandemic Cameroon and a broken processing plant have severely hit farmers' incomes from growing tomatoes** (Photo: Michel Gunther/Biosphoto)

by suicide because they could not pay back the money they borrowed to grow their crops, Kana said. He said there were others who had taken their own lives because of poor output.

Cameroon's lone tomato processing plant in the west region closed down years ago, meaning the country cannot process the crop into other products and farmers have limited time to get rid of the product.

"We usually contact clients before going to the farm – so they just come and carry tomatoes in baskets. Now without ready markets, we are forced to throw some away. The situation is really bad," Mary Mbaizoa, a tomato farmer in Yaoundé, told the *M&G*.

Last month, in response to the situation, Cameroon's minister of agriculture and rural development, Gabriel Mbairrobe, said his ministry was planning a bail-out plan for the sector amounting to two-billion francs (about \$3.5-million). Part of this plan includes the distribution of fertilisers, seeds and pesticides to co-operatives while the government sets up a rehabilitation scheme for the abandoned tomato-processing plant in the West region.

"We will be happy if we can have a processing plant functioning, so that we don't fall into this shock again. It aches my heart," Mbaizoa said. ■

MEANWHILE IN  
AFRICA...



## The million-case milestone

**Refiloe Seiboko**

**O**n February 14, the first case of Covid-19 in Africa was confirmed in Egypt. This week, the continent recorded an unwelcome milestone as it confirmed more than 1,000,000 positive cases. The virus appears to be spreading exponentially: the continent was at about

100,000 cases at the end of May, 200,000 before the end of June and 500,000 in mid-July. The true figures may be even higher, given that most African countries have not been able to roll out effective mass testing. “What we’d like to see – to be able to be really confident – is higher testing rates,” said the World Health Organisation’s Africa head Matshidiso Moeti. ■

# Zimbabwe

## Dark forces. Bad apples. Rogue Zimbabweans

**As opposition mounts,  
President Mnangagwa  
lashes out**

**Kudzai Mashininga in Harare**

**O**n Tuesday, President Emmerson Mnangagwa delivered an unusual televised address to the nation in which he used strong language reminiscent of the late Robert Mugabe.

Mnangagwa described the country's opposition as terrorists and lashed out at "bad apples" who were sabotaging his government.

Even as he was talking, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign – borrowing language from the Black Lives Matter movement – was gaining traction on Twitter, thrusting Zimbabwe's political economic crises onto the international news agenda with endorsements from the likes of AKA, Ice Cube, Thandie Newton and Pearl Thusi.

Mnangagwa's administration successfully prevented planned

nationwide protests on July 31 by arresting key political and civil society leaders, including journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and author Tsitsi Dangarembga. This was accompanied by the mysterious abduction of several opposition activists, at least one of whom was tortured. But the heavy-handed tactics may have backfired, instead drawing global attention to the government's failings.

In his address, Mnangagwa said that "a few rogue Zimbabweans acting in league with foreign detractors" were destabilising the country. "The dark forces, both inside and outside our borders, have tampered with our growth and prosperity for too long. They have thrived on dividing us."

Mduduzi Mathuthu, the editor of online publication ZimLive, said that Mnangagwa's government is "out of ideas" and "has turned to its instruments of repression to defend its hold on power". He is currently in hiding, after police raided his house in an attempt to arrest him. When they realised he was not home, police detained his sister and nephew instead. His nephew, Tawanda Muchehiwa, was later abducted from police custody and tortured, according to the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

"Zimbabwe currently is on a knife edge...Violence has its limits and I'm not convinced the situation is sustainable," Mathuthu told *The Continent*. ■

# Mutapi nhau akasungawa anoratidza kuora moyo kwaita Zimbabwe

Hopewell Chin'ono akatsigira Emmerson Mnangagwa paakaitwa mutungamiri wenyika. Parizvino Chin'ono arimujeri

Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP

## COMMENT Ranga Mberi

**M**ugore rose ra2018, mutapi wenhau Hopewell Chin'ono akaita mukurumbira nekurumbidza nekutsigira Emmerson Mnangagwa mushure memauto eZimbabwe abvuta masimba kuna Robert Mugabe.

Chin'ono nhasi uno ava mufananidzo wekuora moyo kwaita vazhinji vaimbotsigira Mnangagwa.

## Gwara idzva

Kubviswa pachigaro kwaMugabe kwakagamuchirwa nevazhinji, muZimbabwe nepasi rese. Mugabe anga agarisa pachigaro kubvira 1980, uye akanga ava kuedza kugadza mudzimai wake, Grace, pachigaro.

Saka pakasvika mauto kuzobvisa Mugabe, zviuru nezviuru zvevanhu zvakaungana mumigwagwa kunotsigira VaMnangagwa. Pakanga pasati papera mavhiki matatu VaMnangagwa vatzira

kuSouth Africa. Vazhinji muZimbabwe vakafunga kuti ndiye achagadzirisa zvese munyika.

Chin'ono akange ari mumwe weveruzhinji ava. Muna Kubvumbi 2018, akanyora iye achirumbidza VaMnangagwa, achiti VaMnangagwa “vakashamisa maSenators aishanya kubva America, vachitaura zvinonwisa mvura. Vakataura maminitsi akavika makumi mapfumbamwe, vachingotura befu kuti vapewo vamwe mukana wekumbotaura. Vakataura vakatsiga, semaitiro avo avanozikana nawo.”

Asi mashoko aChin'ono kuna VaChamisa, avo vanotungamirira boka rinopikisa reMovement for Democratic Change (MDC), aive ekutsoropodza.

PaTwitter, Chin'ono aitamba nezita raVaChamisa remadunhurirwa rekuchikoro – iro rekunzi “Wamba dia Wamba”, munhu anozivikanwa kuti akatadza kubudirira munyaya dzenyika ku DR Congo. Chin'ono aiti zvitsidzo zvaVaChanisa zvaive “Wambology”, kuri kuzvidza mashoko aVaChamisa.

Asi nzira yaChin'ono yeku Damasica yanga isiri kure. Achitaura na Trevor Ncube, muridzi we bepanhau, Chin'ono akabvunzwa kuti: “Mugore ra 2017, pakatora Mnangagwa chigaro, waimutsigira zvikuru, uye uchishoropodza MDC”.

Chin'ono akapindura akati: “Mnangagwa akanga avimbisa kuti aizounza hurongwa hutsva hwaitarisirwa nevanhu wese.

Asi aive manyepo aVaMnangagwa,

akadaro Chin'ono. Anoti iye akazocheuka mugore ra2018, apo makurukota ehurumende vatadza kuzadzisa zvavakanga vavimbisa zvekugadzirisa ZBC, iyo inoshorwa zvikuru neruzhinji. Akanga adaidzwa na Mai Monica Mutswangwa, vanova gurukota rezvekufambiswa kwemashoko, vachiti abatsire kugadzirisa ZBC.

Iri ranga riri basa rakaoma, asi ibasa raida kuitwa. Zvirongwa zvepa ZBC zvakasara chose. Kana dziri nhau dzacho dzinotosetsa; dzinenge dzenyika dzakare dzehudzvanyiriri.

Chin'ono anoti akabata shamwari dzake dzinoita zvenhau mhiri, uye nekutaura nevamiririri vedzimwe nyika vari muno. Anoti iye nyika yeBritain yakanga yati ichaisa mari inosvika £3-million kubatsira ZBC. Ukuwo, CNN yakavimbisa kudzidzisa vatapi nevanyori venhau veZBC.

**“Pandakaona izvi,  
ndakabva ndaziva kuti  
hapana chitsva apa,  
manyepo chete,”  
akadaro Chin'ono**

Asi havazi vese vakafirira kuti ZBC ishanduke, sezvakanga zvichiratidzwa naMutsvangwa. Mumapepanhau ehurumende makatanga kunyorwa mashoko ekushora Chin'ono, zvichinzi aiva mutengesi aida kutengesa mapepanhau enyika kuvavengi vekunze.

“Pandakaona Izvi, ndakabva ndaziva





**Mutangamiri wenyika ye Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa**  
(Photo: AFP)

kuti hapana chitsva apa, manyepo chete,” akadararo Chin’ono.

### **Kunyepa kutsva**

Ndiko kurasikirwa kwakaita Mnangagwa nemutsigiri uyu. Kubva ipapo, Chin’ono, aiva mutsigiri mukuru waMnangagwa pa Twitter, akabva atanga kurira senyenze kushoropodza hurumende.

Mumwedzi waKubvumbi gore rino, kwakabuda nyaya yekuti Drax International, kambani yainzi inodyidzana nemwanakomana waMnangagwa, yakanga yapiwa basa guru nehurumende. Zvainzi basa iri raiva rekutenga mishonga nembatya dzemuzvipatara (Personal Protective Equipment) zvehurumende. Mari yaizobuda apa yaisvika makumi matanhatu emamirioni emadhora (USD\$60-million).

Chin’ono akashandisa Twitter zvakananyanya kushambadza nyaya iyi. Aitoburitsa magwaro kuratidza kuti

huori uhwu hwaifambiswa sei.

Vanyadziswa, vakatuma mutauri we Zanu-PF kushoropodza Chin’ono. Patrick Chinamasa akatodoma Chin’ono nezita, achiti mukomana uyu anyanya kusimbirira nekushoropodza mhuri yemukuru wenyika. Takanzwa Chinamasa oti “nhubu” dzinenge vana Hopewell Chin’ono dzaida kusvibisa zita remwana wemutungamiri.

Chin’ono ndokukandawo mhinduro yake paTwitter, achiti: “Hupenyu hwangu hwavamunjodzi zvichiteera mashoko akataurwa nemutauri we Zanu-PF. Handisi kushoropodza. Ndinongoshoropodza huwori chete”.

Aisareva nhema. Akasvikirwa nemapurisa.

“Varikupaza musha wangu, zivisai pasi rose,” akazivisa vanhu paTwitter.

Akapomerwa mhosva yokukurudzira kurwiswa kwehurumende.

Mnangagwa paari kutadza kugadzirisa zvehupfumi hwenyika, nekusiya huwori



munyika, nekusachengetedza kodzero yevanhu, vazhinji kaya vaimutsigira vave kumushoropodza. Vakawanda vakaita saHopewell. Haasi ega aimbova mutsigiri waMnangagwa ava mupikisi wake nhasi.

Mumwedzi wa Gunyana 2018, Mnangagwa akasarudza Mthuli Ncube kuita mubati wehomwe yenyika. Ncube uyu airemekedzwa chaizvo. Akamboshanda ari mutevedzeri wemutungamiri we African Development Bank, akadzidzisa nezve mari pazvikoro zvikuru, kuWitwatersrand nekuOxford. Mumwe muzvinabhizinesi, Shingi Munyeza, uyo aimboshoropodzawo hurumende kare, akatambira kusarudzwa kwa Ncube nerufaro. Akarova bembera, achiti “uyu ndiye mubati wehomwe yehurumende ano remekedzwa kudarika vese vakambovapo pamakore makumi maviri apfuura...mubati wehomwe arinani pana vose kubva mugore ra 2000. Batai mazwi awa.”

## **Vakawanda vakaita saHopewell. Haasi ega aimbova mutsigiri waMnangagwa ava mupikisi wake nhasi**

Munyeza akazarudzwa seumwe chipangamazano waMnangagwa. Asi nhasi zvasanduka. Mazuvano arikushoropodza hurumende zuva nezuva, achiti waMnangagwa vanotungamira boka rinoita masaba erima.


Hazvizi zvizvarwa zvemuZimbabwe zvenga zvakanenge dzwa navaMnangagwa. Mugore ra2018, VaPeter Hain, avo vaimbova nhume yeBritain muAfrica, vakasarudzwa kuva chipangamazano chaZunaid Moti, mukuru weAfrica Chrome Field iri muZimbabwe.

Vachitaura muna 2018, VaHain vakati ivo: “Iyi yave nguva itsva mu Zimbabwe. Mutungamiri wakare aenda, kwauya mutsva anehurongwa hutsva.” VaHain vakafananidza Mnangagwa naGorbachev wekuRussia. Vakativze ino yava nguva yekuunza hupfumi muZimbabwe.

Asi musu wa 30 Chikunguru iro gore rino, muparamende yekuUnited Kingdom, Hain akasimuka akati: “Musu wa 20 Chikunguru, mutapi wenhau anoremekedzwa, Hopewell Chin’ono, akasungwa ndokunyimwa bail nekuda kwekushoropodza huwori. Anotogona kupika jeri kwemakore gumi. Hurumende yeUK haingatemberi here zvimwe zvirango pamakurukota eZimbabwe nevakuru vemaoto?”

Chin’ono aivawo netariro yekuti Mnangagwa aizatora rimwe gwara rekutungamirira Zimbabwe. Haasi ega aiva netariro iyi. Muna 2017, vazhinji vakazadza nhandare yeNational Sports Stadium, vachipemberera VaMnangagwa vachigadzwa. Yaiva tariro. Ndivo vana Hopewell; vaiva vatsigiri vaMnangagwa, asi nhasi uno vave vasungwa vake. ■

*Shanduko: P.S. Rupiya*



# The symbol of a disillusioned Zimbabwe

**Journalist Hopewell Chin'ono backed President Emmerson Mnangagwa when he succeeded Robert Mugabe. Now he's in jail.**

Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP

## COMMENT

### Ranga Mberi

**F**or most of 2018, journalist Hopewell Chin'ono rose to Twitter fame as a supporter of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who had replaced Robert Mugabe after a military coup the year before. Now he is into his third week in jail, on trumped-up charges of trying to incite people to overthrow the man he once praised.

Chin'ono is, in a way, a symbol of the disillusionment with Mnangagwa, and evidence of how quickly the president has squandered his goodwill.

### The new dispensation

Mugabe's overthrow and Mnangagwa's ascendency had widespread local and international support. Mugabe, who first came to power in 1980, had stayed in office well past his bedtime. Worse, he was about to anoint his wife, Grace, as

his successor.

So, when army tanks arrived to pry him from office, just days after he had fired Mnangagwa, thousands spilled into the streets in support of the deputy president. When Mnangagwa took over, less than three weeks after fleeing to South Africa, many Zimbabweans cast him as the reformist they had been waiting for.

Chin'ono was among the many. In an article in April 2018, Chin'ono wrote about how Mnangagwa had “surprised [visiting United States] senators and their staffers when he turned on the charm offensive, only stopping once to give way for remarks in his 90-minute address punctuated by calmness which has always been an essential part of his persona and style”.

For Nelson Chamisa, who had vaulted over equally ambitious rivals – and the party's constitution – to take charge of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in February 2018, there was ridicule.

On Twitter, playing on Chamisa's nickname – he was called “Wamba dia Wamba” in college – Chin'ono coined the term “Wambology” to make fun of Chamisa's often ambitious campaign promises.

But Chin'ono's road-to-Damascus moment soon came. It happened over a media reform deal gone bad. In a recent interview, newspaper publisher Trevor Ncube asked him: “When Emmerson Mnangagwa became president in 2017, am I right that you were largely supportive

of him, and generally critical of MDC?” Chin'ono replied: “Emmerson Mnangagwa had promised that he was going to deliver the change that we were looking for.”

It was all a lie, Chin'ono said, and he realised this after discussions, late in 2018, with senior officials over a possible deal to reform Zimbabwe's state broadcaster. He had received a call from Monica Mutsvangwa, the information minister, asking for help with modernising the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC).

This would be a tough job, but necessary. The station is stuck in the past. Its comical nightly news broadcasts fit every caricature of a dictatorship's media mouthpiece.

## **Chin'ono's road-to-Damascus moment soon came after a media reform deal gone bad**

Chin'ono called on his contacts at foreign embassies and in international media. The United Kingdom, he told Ncube, was ready to “put £3-million on the table” to train ZBC journalists. CNN, he said, was also prepared to train journalists and make ZBC an affiliate broadcaster.

But not everyone was as enthusiastic about the reforms as Mutsvangwa had appeared to be. Soon, articles started appearing in the state press: Chin'ono was



**Defiant:**  
Zimbabwean  
novelist Tsitsi  
Dangarembga  
is arrested  
after staging an  
anti-corruption  
protest on  
July 31 (Photo:  
Zinyange  
Auntony/AFP)

a puppet trying to deliver state media to the West, the articles said.

“At that point I realised that the new dispensation was actually a new deception. There was nothing new about it,” Chin’ono recalled.

### **The new deception**

Mnangagwa had one less supporter. Chin’ono went from leading the pro-Mnangagwa brigade on Twitter to being one of the shrillest critics of the regime.

Then, in April this year, it emerged that Drax International, a company alleged to have links to one of Mnangagwa’s sons, had won a \$60-million contract to supply drugs and personal protective equipment to Zimbabwe. Relentlessly, Chin’ono tweeted about the scandal, posting leaked internal memorandums

and contracts that highlighted the depth of the corruption.

### **Chin’ono went from leading the pro-Mnangagwa brigade on Twitter to being one of the shrillest critics of the regime**

Embarrassed, Mnangagwa wheeled out his lieutenants to attack Chin’ono. At a press conference, spokesman Patrick Chinamasa singled out the journalist: “We have noted the systematic targeted attacks of the first family members by unscrupulous characters like Hopewell Chin’ono targeting the president’s son.”

Chin’ono tweeted in response: “My

life is now in danger after Zanu-PF attacked me personally through their spokesperson Patrick Chinamasa. I am only a detractor of corruption.”

He was right. On the morning of July 20, armed police smashed a glass door and entered his house. “They are breaking into my home. Alert the world!” tweeted Chin’ono. He was later charged for inciting violence against the government.

**“My life is now  
in danger after  
Zanu-PF attacked me  
personally through  
their spokesperson  
Patrick Chinamasa.  
I am only a detractor  
of corruption.”**

As Mnangagwa failed to deliver on reforms and the economy, while allowing corruption and rights abuses to continue, there are many Hopewells who have seen through the ruse. Many of Mnangagwa’s most ardent supporters have become critical of him.

In September 2018, Mnangagwa appointed as finance minister Mthuli Ncube, a banker who was once a vice-president at the African Development Bank and taught finance at the universities of the Witwatersrand and Oxford. Businessman Shingi Munyeza, a longtime government critic, gushed: “This is the most credible finance minister

in 20 years ... a better finance minister by far since 2000. Save this tweet.”

Munyeza accepted a post as one of Mnangagwa’s advisers. These days, however, he tweets bitterly that Mnangagwa is the head of an “occult system”.

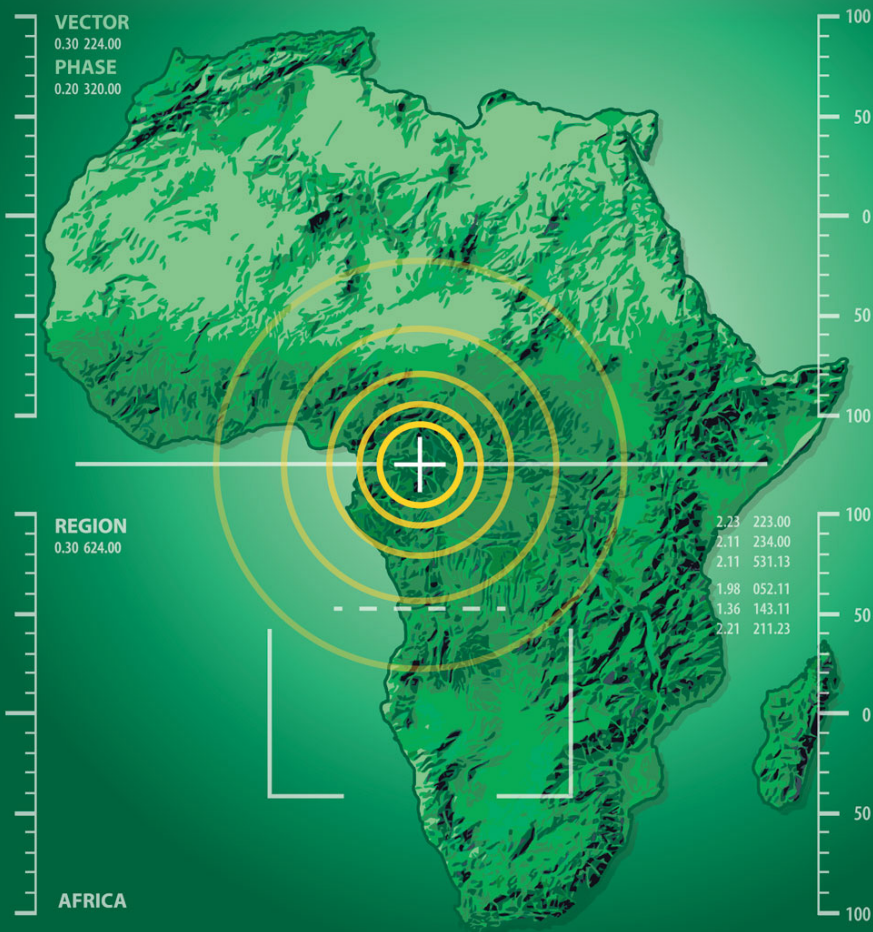
It was not just Zimbabweans who fell for Mnangagwa’s apparent charms. In March 2018, Britain’s former Africa minister, Peter Hain, visited Zimbabwe. He had just been appointed consultant for Zunaid Moti, a controversial businessman running Africa Chrome Fields, a mine in Zimbabwe.

“There is a new era in Zimbabwe as the former president is now gone and the new president has a new agenda,” Hain told an interviewer. Mnangagwa, Hain said, would be Zimbabwe’s Gorbachev. It was time to invest.

But on July 30, in the UK Parliament, Hain told his government: “On July 20 highly respected journalist Hopewell Chin’ono was arrested and denied bail for supporting an anti-corruption protest and faces 10 years in jail. Can the government update its sanctions to cover more Zimbabwe ministers and security chiefs?”

Chin’ono had dared to hope that Mnangagwa would take Zimbabwe on a different path. He was not alone. In 2017, thousands filled the National Sports Stadium to cheer on his inauguration. But, like Hopewell, they have gone from being Mnangagwa’s supporters, to being his prisoners. ■

## Inside the secret world of US commandos in Africa





## **A *Mail & Guardian* investigation reveals, for the first time, the vast African footprint of America's most elite combat troops – and that more US commandos are deployed to Africa in secretive missions than anywhere else in the world, after the war zones of the Middle East.**

**Nick Turse, Sam Mednick in Ouagadougou and Amanda Sperber in Nairobi.** This investigation was produced in partnership with the Pulitzer Center

**T**he activities of the United States Special Operations forces – including Navy SEALs, Army Green Berets and Marine Corps Raiders – are shrouded in secrecy. These are the US military's most secretive and highly-trained soldiers, responsible for sensitive counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and "direct action combat raids." Their operations are rarely publicised.

Except when they go wrong.

In 2017, Islamic State fighters in Niger ambushed American troops near the village of Tongo Tongo. Four US soldiers died, including two from the Green Berets.

This incident provided a glimpse into the secret world of US commandos operating in Africa. A *Mail & Guardian* investigation can reveal, for the first time, the full extent of that world.

In 2019, US Special Ops forces were active not just in Niger, but in a total of 22 African countries: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Côte D'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania and Tunisia.

This accounts for a significant proportion of US Special Ops forces' global activity: more than 14% of US commandos deployed overseas in 2019 were sent to Africa, the largest percentage of any region in the world except for the Middle East.

These figures come from information provided to the *M&G* by the US military's Special Operations Command and Africa Command (AFRICOM).

An interview with Donald Bolduc, a retired brigadier general and head of Special Operations Command Africa until 2017, shed further light on

these operations. He said that as of 2017, US Special Ops forces had seen combat in 13 African nations. America's most elite troops continued to be active in 10 of those countries – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, and Tunisia – last year, he said.

## Advise, assist, accompany

The military footprint of the United States in Africa is extensive. Previous reporting has revealed the existence of a string of at least 29 military bases across the continent, in 15 countries, few of which are officially acknowledged by the US government.

Even more secretive still are the activities of US Special Operations forces. Their presence in African countries is rarely officially acknowledged, either by the US or host nations; citizens are not told what these elite combat troops are doing on their land.

The US military is tight-lipped about exactly what its elite forces do in each country, but special operators have long conducted missions that range from capture-or-kill

commando raids to more banal training missions.

The *M&G* has spoken to a wide range of sources to fill in the blanks, including US military officers and diplomats; active and retired US special forces operators; African government and military sources; recipients of US military training in Africa; and civilian witnesses. What emerges is a comprehensive picture of US Special Ops forces' activities in Africa.

Some special operations are conducted under the auspices of the so-called 127e programs, named for the budgetary authority that allows US Special Operations forces to use local military units as surrogates in counterterrorism missions. For reasons of security, Special Operations



Command will not release information on 127e programs, said spokesperson Ken McGraw.

However, the *M&G* has confirmed that in recent years the US has conducted at least eight 127e programs in Africa, most of them in Somalia. Currently, the US is conducting two 127e programs in Somalia, according to an AFRICOM official. The *M&G* was able to obtain detailed information on how a 127e program has been used to create and train the Danab Brigade, an elite Somali special forces unit.

Headquartered in Baledogle, a Soviet-built airport about 100 kilometres north of Mogadishu, Danab has a contingent of 850 troops. Baledogle itself is host to one of the largest concentrations of US defence personnel in Africa, behind only bases in Djibouti and Niger.

The *M&G* spoke to two civilians who live near Baledogle, who both requested that their names be withheld. The first civilian said that since 2012, the base has been getting “bigger and bigger”. According to the second civilian, the construction on the base – including a \$12-million runway refurbishment – has led to more employment opportunities for locals.

In March this year, AFRICOM’s deputy director of operations Miguel Castellanos said that he expected the US to continue supporting Danab until at least 2027, with the goal to increase the size of the force to 3,000 soldiers.

US commandos sometimes accompany Danab units on raids, with a mandate to “advise, assist and accompany” – although such missions can sometimes be indistinguishable from combat.

The number of ground missions carried out by US commandos in Somalia has never previously been revealed, but US Air Force documents obtained by the *M&G* – via the Freedom of Information Act, and corroborated by Bolduc – indicate the scale of these efforts. The documents, from the 449th Air Expeditionary Group based in Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, show that the US and partner nations conducted more than 200 ground missions against Al Shabaab between June 2017 and June 2018.

This number is no anomaly. “That’s about average, annually, for the time I was there, too,” said Bolduc, who headed the Special Operations Command Africa from April 2015 to June 2017.

## Counter-terrorism training

Another major theatre of special forces operations is in north-west Africa. The flagship US military operation in the region is Juniper Shield,

a counterterrorism effort involving 11 nations: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia.

Under Juniper Shield, US Special Operations forces have trained, advised, assisted and accompanied local partner forces conducting missions aimed at terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda and its affiliates, Boko Haram and Islamic State. The effort, according to the AFRICOM documents, was ongoing as of February.

To understand what this training looks like, the *M&G* spoke to several state security officers in Burkina Faso who have participated.

One army officer based in Fada N’Gourma, the main town in the east, said teams have been receiving training from the US since 2018. Sessions are two weeks and include 30 people from the army and police. The men are trained by up to 20 Americans and taught the importance of winning civilian trust and counter-IED training, he said. They were given explosive detection kits, cameras and bags that could be used to send samples to the laboratory.

“The training was very good and very practical. Short but intense,” he



**Training in 2018 for Djibouti's Rapid Intervention Brigade is overseen by US troops. (Photo: Timothy Ahearn/US Navy)**

said. He was not authorised to speak on the record.

According to one Special Operations officer formerly based in Burkina Faso, who didn't want to be named, the general approach was to combine military training with civil engagement, such as teaching the army to clear the roads of bombs, getting the police to set up checkpoints and then bringing in a company to repair the potholes, making it harder for armed groups to plant explosives. The officer told *M&G* that everything they did was classified under Operation Juniper Shield.

Not all of the places where US Special Ops forces operate in Africa are in or near war zones. Take, for example, Botswana – one of the continent's most established and peaceful democracies.

In response to questions from the *M&G*, the US Embassy in Botswana said that Special Ops forces participated in Exercise Upward Minuteman, a three week training event held in June 2019 at the Thebephatshwa Air Base in Molepolole. The training involved 200 National Guardsmen from the North Carolina National Guard and an unspecified number of soldiers from the Botswana Defence Force (BDF). It included everything from weapons training to air and ground assault simulations.

Botswana's armed forces enjoy a relatively clean reputation. This is not true of all the countries with which the US has chosen to partner. Burkina Faso's armed forces have been repeatedly implicated in serious human rights violations; as have the Danab Brigade in Somalia.

A US State Department official, speaking on background, said they were closely monitoring alleged human rights by partner militaries, and it excludes from assistance and training individuals or units guilty of human rights violations.

By partnering with these forces, the US risks legitimising these abuses, argues Temi Ibirogbu, a program and research associate with the Africa Program at the Center for International Policy.

"If the most powerful democratic nation in the world is supporting your military, you'll surely believe that the human rights violations you've committed are excusable," she said.

### **A 'creeping build-up'**

Andy Duhon, a former US Special Operations forces officer with more than a decade of experience operating in the Sahel region, questioned the effectiveness of the US military's involvement in Africa. He said that the US does not understand what African countries want, and as a result is unsure how to best intervene.



**War games: Commandos from the Botswana Defence Force in a training exercise with US Special Ops forces operators (Photo: US Army)**

“The US isn’t doing enough. It wants to help but it needs to do a better job of understanding grassroots organizations, governments and the military, instead of just sending money towards long-term training and equipment programs,” said Duhon.

Comfort Ero, the International Crisis Group’s Africa Program Director, said that the extent of US special forces operations in Africa illustrates the “creeping build-up” of the US military in Africa. Although, she added, it’s a mixed message: “There’s a build-up on the one hand, and restraint on the other. It’s clear that the US does not want to be on the front line.”

Ero said that the lack of transparency – from both US and African governments – on the US military’s presence in Africa is a cause for concern, as is their apparent willingness to work with authoritarian governments. “It does feed into that broader concern that some states are being propped up...the US is seen as legitimising and further prolonging authoritarian tendencies, or states who are not seen as having legitimacy.” ■

*With additional reporting in Gaborone by Joel Konopo of the INK Centre for Investigative Journalism, and editing by Simon Allison. This investigation has been edited for length. The full version will be published on Monday August 10 on the Mail & Guardian’s website.*



# SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how well you really know our continent

(Photo: John/Flickr)

1. Which Bantu language, spoken mostly in both Congos, borrows from French, Spanish, Portuguese and English?
2. Mbabane and Lobamba are the capitals of which country?
3. Jacaranda trees are known to flourish in four African countries. Name one.
4. Footballer Romelu Lukaku was born and raised in Belgium. Where is his family from originally?
5. True or false: the hippopotamus is native to North Africa?
6. In which region of the continent would one typically eat egusi soup?
7. King Letsie III is the monarch of which country?
8. Which four countries are considered the Horn of Africa?
9. Which country celebrated its 60th anniversary of independence on Friday August 7?
10. What city was formerly known as Salisbury?
11. In which year was Nelson Mandela elected president of South Africa?
12. The dirham is the currency of which country?

## How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

9-12

"Borders are an artificial construct."

# Pride beyond borders

Sharon Allela

**I**t's not every day that one gets a chance to speak to a world-class athlete. My chat with one of Africa's most celebrated athletes, Springbok captain Siya Kolisi, left my audience and me mind-blown.

When the Springboks won the Rugby World Cup in 2019, South Africa was going through a period of immense challenges. One of the biggest was the xenophobia that fuelled a wave of hatred across the continent. Embassies were being stoned, foreign-owned businesses torched and thousands of people were fearing for their lives.

On the weekend of the World Cup finals, Nairobi told a totally different story. The city was bustling with life with sports enthusiasts donning the Springboks jersey. We put our differences aside to support our African brothers as they represented the continent on the global stage. When I asked Siya about that memorable weekend, he admitted to being overwhelmed by the support that the team got from other African countries.

"Diversity of Africans is our strength. We need each other as Africans, whether we like it or not. We need to start accepting that and start using it as the asset that it is and use it for the betterment



**Continental captain: The Springboks after the 2019 Rugby World Cup final**  
(Photo: Odd Andersen/AFP)

of the continent which deserves to be one of the best continents in the world because we have everything we need to be great," he said.

Tata Madiba once said that sport has the power to unite people like little else can. The Springboks and the historic world cup win brought Africa together. They also showed us Kenyans that it is indeed possible for us to win the trophy for a nation that is one the world's powerhouses in the rugby sevens series. Like Eliud Kipchoge said, "no human is limited" and no African is limited.

As we battle a pandemic, we are reminded of the spirit of pan-Africanism, of times we were once united for a more significant cause. At the moment, it seems every man for himself and every country for herself. We have to hold each other accountable and act responsibly to pull through to the other side. ■

*Sharon Allela is a sports consultant and founder of Adana Sports and Entertainment*

# How a notorious arms dealer hijacked Niger's budget

Mark Anderson, Khadija Sharife, and Nathalie Prevost for the  
Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project

**A**s militant groups spread across the Sahel, the West African nation of Niger went on a US-backed military spending spree that totaled about US\$1-billion between 2011 and 2019.

But almost a third of that money was funnelled into inflated international arms deals – seemingly designed to allow corrupt officials and brokers to siphon off government funds, according to a confidential government audit obtained by OCCRP that covers those eight years.

The Inspection Générale des Armées, an independent body that audits the armed forces, found problems with contracts amounting to over \$320-million out of the \$875-million in military spending it reviewed. The US contributed almost \$240-million to Niger's military budget over the same period.

The Inspection Générale's auditors said more than 76-billion West African francs had been lost to corruption, which is about \$137-million at the current exchange rate.

They discovered that much of the equipment sourced from international firms – including Russian, Ukrainian, and Chinese state-owned defence companies – was significantly overpriced, not actually

delivered, or purchased without going through a competitive bidding process.

"The rigged bidding process, fake competition, and inflated pricing in these deals is astounding," said Andrew Feinstein, a leading arms expert and author of *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade*.

The Nigerien authorities are investigating the findings of the audit, which have caused a scandal in the country after some details were reported in the press earlier this year.

The country has become a key ally for the United States in fighting groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State West Africa Province, better known as Boko Haram. The surge in spending over the last decade helped Niger become one of the most formidable military powers in the region. The country – one of the world's poorest – bought arms ranging from attack helicopters and fighter jets to armored vehicles and automatic rifles. In addition to cash it provided to Niger's military, the US spent \$280-million building a massive air base near the ancient trading city of Agadez in the north of the country. The base, which reportedly costs \$30-million a year to run,



**Spoils of war: The palatial Niamey mansion belonging to well-known arms dealer Aboubacar Hima (Photo: Nathalie Prevost/OCCRP)**

allows US forces to launch drones for both surveillance and air strikes.

American forces are also training Nigerien soldiers and fighting alongside them. In 2017, four US Special Operations forces officers were killed in an ambush in the country's frontier with Mali and Burkina Faso, reportedly by fighters associated with the so-called Islamic State.

France and the European Union are also major donors to Niger's military, which receives further aid through its membership in G5 Sahel, a regional joint military force. The audit report raises the possibility that some of the military aid ended up in the pockets of unscrupulous private individuals and corrupt government officials.

At the centre of the network of corruption are two Nigerien businessmen who acted as intermediaries in the deals: the well-known arms dealer Aboubacar

Hima – who goes by the nicknames “Style Féroce” and “Petit Boubé,” – and Aboubacar Charfo, a construction contractor with no previous experience in the defence sector. Auditors allege that the two men rigged bids by using companies under their control to create the illusion of competition for contracts.

Their success points to the opportunities available to a small clique of well-connected insiders with close ties to Niger's government.

Hima's lawyer, Marc Le Bihan, declined to answer reporters' questions, saying that his client could not be reached and adding that he was not being prosecuted in connection with the auditors' report. ■

*This investigation was first published by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, and has been edited for length. The full version is available here: <https://bit.ly/NigerOCCRP>*

# Social media alone can't save democracy in Zimbabwe

**Bruce Mutsvairo**

Despite the rise of WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook, social media has many limitations as a way to liberate Africa's oppressed peoples. Recent events in Zimbabwe explain why.

On July 31, anti-corruption campaigners, journalists, and opposition leaders joined forces to express their opposition to the government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The government's response was heavy-handed. Before and on July 31, prominent outspoken figures such as whistle-blowing journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume and Booker Prize nominated writer Tsitsi Dangarembga were arrested – along with many others.

These three figures had all been vocal on Twitter and Facebook calling for change. Chin'ono is one of the most effective critics of government – his work has helped oust two ministers on corruption charges. But while those opposed to the ruling Zanu-PF party consider social media as a godsend for potential political emancipation, history has taught us Zimbabwe's deeply-rooted problems will not be mediated on social media.

Last year, access to social media platforms was blocked amid government

denials of digital interference, while anti-government digital activists have previously faced treason charges. Chin'ono's arrest is itself a testimony to the limitations of social media as a weapon against what Zimbabwean government critics see as longstanding authoritarianism. By detaining him, the Zimbabwean government wants to remind everyone that they are still in charge.

Digital activism has the potential to change African politics, but authoritarian governments can simply impose a social media “tax” and arrest their most prominent critics. All of a sudden Twitter and Facebook look like much less threatening spaces.

So what can be done? At some point we may need to recognise that digital activism will not remove Zanu-PF from power. Zanu-PF is part of Zimbabwe's problem but it may also have to be part of the solution. They simply cannot be wished away – and as a result digital protest may need to go hand-in-hand with engagement. ■

*Bruce Mutsvairo is an author and Professor of Journalism at Auburn University in the United States. This analysis is published in partnership with Democracy in Africa*



# In Zimbabwe, even the president's inner circle is unhappy

## ANALYSIS

### Africa Confidential

**A**fter two years of dangerous drift, military officers and state officials are covertly talking to opposition figures about the president's exit and a transitional authority.

The extraordinary morning broadcast by President Emmerson Mnangagwa on August 4 reinforced the national sense that his legitimacy is eroding as fast as the value of the Zimbabwean dollar. Heading a government which has detained some of the region's best novelists and journalists, and abducted and tortured opposition activists, Mnangagwa warned citizens about "the bad apples that have attempted to divide our people. Good shall triumph over evil".

Those divisions are festering at the heart of his government. A week earlier at a meeting of the politburo, the 50-strong policy-making body of the ruling party, Mnangagwa called on Isaac Moyo, director general of the Central Intelligence Organisation, to report on a "de-stabilisation" plot claimed to have been run by Claveria Chizema, a politburo member, and Tendai Savanhu, a former MP for Mbare.

Moyo explained that the plot showed collusion between dissidents within the

ruling party and opposition activists whose aim was to drive Mnangagwa from power with a campaign of mass protests. Moyo claims his spies had discovered stocks of posters and placards calling for the toppling of Mnangagwa and praising his deputy former army general Constantino Chiwenga stashed at the homes of the party dissidents.

**The president's broadcast on August 4 reinforced the national sense that his legitimacy is eroding as fast as the value of the Zimbabwean dollar**

According to Moyo, after Mnangagwa was forced out, the plan was that Chiwenga would preside over a national transitional authority committed to constitutional and economic reforms and free elections. In other words, a classic palace coup. An ironic reworking of the putsch that Mnangagwa and Chiwenga had jointly organised against President Robert Mugabe in November 2017.

As Moyo explained the details of the plot against Mnangagwa to the politburo, Chiwenga, just back from another medical check-up in China, looked on impassively.



Neither Moyo nor Mnangagwa accused Chiwenga of complicity in the plot from which he was meant to benefit. But the implied accusation hung in the room.

Despite their working together for decades, relations between Mnangagwa and Chiwenga have cooled this year. They are unlikely to have improved after Mnangagwa added the health portfolio to Chiwenga's responsibilities. Obadiah Moyo, the sacked health minister, is being prosecuted for corruption after journalist Hopewell Chin'ono exposed a procurement scam involving the minister and a businessman and friend of Mnangagwa's family.

Yet Chin'ono is being detained on charges of subversion, tied into the planned anti-corruption protests, and minister Moyo is out on bail.

## **Despite working together for decades relations between Mnangagwa and Chiwenga have cooled this year**

Both Chiwenga and the Commander of the national army, Lieutenant General Edzai Chanyuka Chimonyo, have been telling colleagues and business people that the country is drifting dangerously. A former officer told Africa Confidential that such talk is army code meaning the junior officers will act if the senior officers don't.

Living conditions for junior officers and the ranks have deteriorated sharply under Mnangagwa, despite the common

complaint by civilians that he is running a military regime. It is mainly a thin stripe of top officers that have benefited in the past two years.

Until now, Mnangagwa has been protected by a group of senior officers and security specialists from the Midlands province – many of whom were in turn protected by Mnangagwa, for their role in the Gukurahundi massacre in the 1980s.

But according to Africa Confidential's sources, several people in this ruling group now favour either Chiwenga or General Sibusiso Moyo to take over from Mnangagwa in a palace coup that would allow the formation of a National Transitional Authority, in consultation with opposition leader Nelson Chamisa.

The decision by the United States Treasury on August 5 to sanction Mnangagwa's business ally Kudakwashe Tagwirei, chief executive of Sakunda Holdings and majority owner of Landela Mining Ventures, raises the stakes. Widely seen as a proxy for Mnangagwa, Tagwirei's dealings with commodity traders Trafigura have made him immensely wealthy in his own right.

This week, Tagwirei was looking uncharacteristically worried when driving his new pink Rolls Royce through Chisipite, one of Harare's most prosperous suburbs. As, surely, is Mnangagwa – outside his fast-diminishing circle of admirers, few believe that the president should hang on. ■

*This was first published by Africa Confidential, and has been edited for length. The original is available here: <https://bit.ly/ZimbabweAC>*

# Ghana's plan to escape the Covid blues

Audrey Donkor

**G**hana's economy, like all others, has been battered by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Late last month, Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta unveiled an ambitious plan to get the country back on its feet. The 3.5-year, 100-billion cedi (\$17.5-billion) plan will allow Ghana "to reimagine and re-envision our future like never before", the minister said.

The plan envisages extending social protection and business support measures, as well as a raft of new legislation to encourage investment.

Perhaps the single most significant aspect of the plan is the proposed creation of a National

Unemployment Insurance Scheme. Under this scheme, workers who are laid off as a result of Covid-19 will be entitled to temporary income support, as well as access to retraining to acquire new skills.

Details of who exactly will be entitled to benefit from the scheme, as well as how much will be allocated for it, have yet to be made public. The finance ministry told the *Mail & Guardian* via email that consultations with labour and employers

are ongoing.

Nonetheless, the radical new policy has been welcomed by business leaders. "Government has done very well," said Enoch Gyetuah, the executive secretary of the Ghana National Council of Private Schools.

Even the main opposition party is in favour. Haruna Iddrissu, the minority leader in Parliament, lauded the new initiative – but sounded a note of caution. He said that there is little reliable data to identify those that lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, making it hard

to differentiate them from people who were unemployed before.

Austin Gamey, a labour expert who chaired the committee

that drafted Ghana's National Labour Law in 2003, is also worried about unreliable data. He said that successive governments have failed to collate employment records; without these records, the national insurance scheme will be very difficult to implement. He said the government should instead pass an emergency law allowing laid-off workers to take out emergency loans against their contributions to the state pension fund. ■

## Part of the plan is the proposal to support laid-off workers



## The Big Picture

**Holiday spirit:** In the Basra neighbourhood of Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott, young boys make their way to the celebrations for the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha (also known as Tabaski). The festival is marked by sacrificing a sheep, which normally means that it is a busy time for Mauritanian shepherds. This year, however, border closures meant that major markets such as Senegal were not accessible. Photo: Carmen Abd Ali/AFP

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