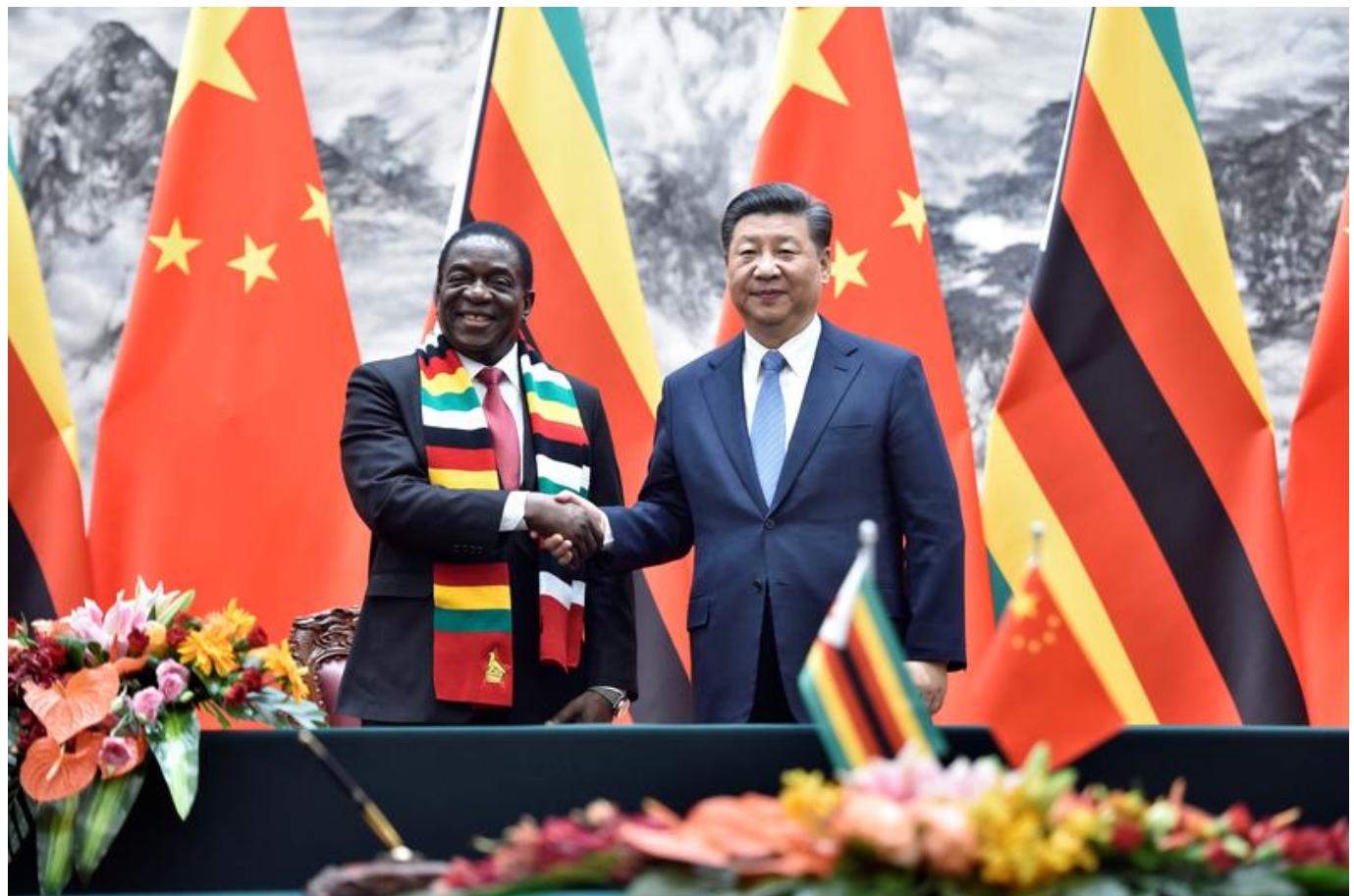


U.S. plan to discredit Chinese investments unmasked

written by The Herald Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa with Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2018.

Harare, Zimbabwe

The United States is sponsoring a strategy to undermine Chinese investments in Zimbabwe by smearing the Asian giant's companies as engaging in widespread labor malpractices, as well as violation of human, community and environmental rights, among other ills, The Herald has learnt.

The strategy is part of an intricate plan, also involving some European and Nordic countries, to discredit Chinese businesses through disinformation, lies and sensationalism in the independent media and social platforms.

It entails portraying Chinese businesses as unethical, reckless, without values, criminal and causing harm to communities, environment and workers.

The weaponization of anti-Chinese sentiment is intended to harm Chinese interests here, and is said to also have the political goal of giving fodder to local opposition ahead of the elections in 2023, by portraying the government and the ruling Zanu PF as condoning the alleged excesses of its ally, China.

Exclusive details obtained by this publication last week indicated that private media journalists are being trained by an outfit called Information for Development Trust (IDT), which poses as an independent investigative journalism center, with the funding of the U.S. Embassy in Harare.

A workshop drawing about a dozen private media journalists was held last week on September 14 to 15 and the journalists were allocated regional/geographical areas of focus with emphasis on areas where Chinese businesses are involved.

These include mining, construction, energy, infrastructure, loans and environment.

The trainers justified that they were focusing on Chinese businesses because China was now the biggest investor in the country.

Our source said: "The training of journalists by the U.S. Embassy is feeding into wider activities by Western countries to equip the media, civil society and legal fraternity to fight the influence and growth of China in Zimbabwe through weaponizing anti-Chinese sentiments as well as exploiting economic vulnerabilities of journalists.

"U.S. Embassy officials bragged during the workshop that they had extended funding to the project and had also previously sponsored media institutions on the so-called accountability issues. They also funded some journalists that are now strategically positioned within the independent media.

"The officials said they were availing resources to 'people that matter' to focus on resource governance and labor issues and providing the 'right instruments'."

It has been established that U.S. Embassy, as part of its so-called public diplomacy, will plan with beneficiaries, discuss work areas, sharpen skills and help journalists improve skills.

Our impeccable source said this is a strategy coming from Washington and implemented by State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs (DRL) through the embassy.

One attendee at the workshop revealed that journalists involved in the workshop have already been given areas and topics to work on according to areas of interests as well as geographical areas that include Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West, Manicaland and Matabeleland North.

The next stage is the production of content and publication of stories in various media, with journalists receiving payment from the U.S. Embassy through its proxy.

Each pitch was promised US\$1 000.

The U.S. Embassy's program coincides with the European Union and some Nordic countries also sponsoring similar workshops, which indicates a well-planned anti-Chinese crusade. Last week, the European Union sponsored a workshop in Masvingo under the theme, "Strengthening the role of the media in support of accountable governance and community development in Zimbabwe."

The goals of the training are similar to the U.S. in seeking to undermine Chinese influence in Zimbabwe.

China — charmed by President Mnangagwa's "Zimbabwe Is Open for Business" policy — is the biggest investor in Zimbabwe at the moment with major infrastructure construction projects underway.

The world's second biggest economy has also extended financial aid to Zimbabwe.

Various Chinese companies have ventured into mining and construction industries, oiling the government's developmental agenda, meant to midwife Zimbabwe's attainment of a middle income economy status by 2030, as enunciated by President Mnangagwa.

