

8

The 1980 Elections and the First Years of Independence

As news of the Lancaster House constitutional and ceasefire agreements began to spread, the celebratory tone of British correspondences often overlooked the difficulties ahead. The details of the ceasefire and transition period left potential pitfalls for a successful transition. For example, the Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, had pointed out to US ambassador Richard Viets that the failure of the British to accept the PF's demands to incorporate their troops into the policing and ceasefire monitoring personnel opened the door for the PF, especially Mugabe's ZANU, to exploit the distribution of forces to their own benefit. Nyerere had told Viets at the end of November that Carrington's unwillingness to negotiate on the sharing of forces during the transition would lead to problems.¹

The British appointed Lord Soames, then leader of the House of Lords and Winston Churchill's son-in-law, to be the governor of Rhodesia in order to oversee the transitional period, and to organize and monitor the majority rule elections that would determine the first leader of an independent Zimbabwe. A main emphasis in this chapter will be placed on Governor Soames' attempt to balance two main concerns: first, avoiding any major problems with the demobilization of the liberation war armies, and second, the successful staging of an internationally recognized "free and fair" election. The British documents covering this period demonstrate Britain's eagerness to get out of Zimbabwe as soon as possible, while avoiding any conflicts between the South Africans and the Zimbabwean nationalists, as well as between the Rhodesian military and the liberation forces.

Mugabe and ZANU, having felt cornered into accepting the Lancaster House agreement, lashed out almost immediately at the British over the

¹ American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, "Front Line Summit meeting: Conversation with Nyerere," November 27, 1979, Dar es Salaam, 5712, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–76, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.



Figure 7 Signing of the Lancaster House Agreement. London, December 21, 1979. Getty Images.

ceasefire agreements, focusing in particular on the presence of South African troops in Rhodesia in the months leading up to the election. Mugabe sent a letter to Thatcher on January 8, 1980, where he threatened to break the Lancaster House arrangements if the South African military presence was not addressed by the British.² From the perspective of the FCO, the presence of the South African troops threatened the transition, mostly because of protests from the OAU and, most importantly, the Nigerians that the South African troops in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia were a violation of the Lancaster House agreement. Discussing how to respond to Mugabe's claims, Charles Powell of the FCO's Rhodesia Department admitted that "there is no alternative to accepting, for the time being, the continued presence of the five South African companies, though wearing Rhodesian uniforms and under Rhodesian command." Powell suggested that the British could split hairs in terms of the language used to describe the situation. "In the meantime we need a new press line – to be agreed with the South Africans – which admits and justifies the existence of the South African unit guarding Beitbridge, but says that the Governor has been assured that there are no other South African forces (as opposed to

² Robert Mugabe to Margaret Thatcher, January 8, 1980, FCO 36/2679, BNA.

South African personnel in the Rhodesian force) in Rhodesia.”³ British estimates of South African forces in Rhodesia were quantified in late January as “5 infantry battalions, 3,500 men; 1 parachute battalion, 600 men; 2 artillery regiments, 1,000 men; 6 armored squadrons, 750 men; total 5,850 men.”⁴

Powell, who was with Governor Soames in Salisbury to help with the transition, was worried that the much larger South African troop presence in the country would become known to the press and create an international outcry. Powell wrote to the FCO to say that the American representative in Salisbury, Edward Lanpher, had mentioned a larger number of South African troops in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Lanpher had told him that Paul Tsongas, a US senator, who had just visited Salisbury, had heard there were some 2,000 South African troops deployed in Rhodesia and “dressed in Rhodesian uniforms.” Lanpher had asked Soames about this, but he “had been given a rather ambiguous reply.” Lanpher told Powell that the “African lobby” in the United States would put the US administration “under pressure . . . to obtain firm assurances” from Britain that “there were no South African forces in Rhodesia.”⁵

Later in this same week, the first week of 1980, British diplomats in Maputo requested suggested language from Soames to use in response to Mugabe’s letter, which ZANU had turned over to the local Mozambican press. Rather than dwelling on the issue of South African troops in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, Soames replied that they should reward Machel’s help in convincing Mugabe and ZANLA leaders to cooperate with the ceasefire regulations. However, Soames reported of “serious problems” occurring with “ZANLA groups terrorizing the Inyanga/Penhalonga area north of Umtali.” Soames recommended that the British diplomats in Mozambique compare ZANLA and ZIPRA: “The point to emphasise is that ZANLA behavior during the ceasefire is in sharp contrast to that of ZIPRA. The latter have been doing their utmost to comply. Of the incidents of violence and lawlessness across the country during this period and confrontations with the

³ C. D. Powell, “Rhodesia: South African Forces,” January 2, 1980, item 1F, FCO 36/2790, BNA.

⁴ From UK Mission UN New York to FCO, “The Deployment of South African Forces in Zimbabwe,” January 30, 1980, item 136, FCO 36/2791, BNA.

⁵ C. D. Powell to Mr. Day, “Rhodesia: South African Forces,” January 3, 1980 FCO 36/2790, BNA. In 1984, Lanpher would be the US deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Zimbabwe, and later the US ambassador to Zimbabwe in the early 1990s.

police the great majority have been attributable to ZANLA.” Soames then mentioned important charges against ZANLA: “There is evidence that ZANLA have been given instructions to exploit the assembly process and its aftermath to exert maximum pressure on the population to support ZANU and evidence also of some ZANLA sections being instructed to remain in the field.”⁶ ZANLA’s lack of cooperation created a problem for Soames, but he would eventually gloss over these difficulties in public given the more pressing British concern of making the transitional period as short as possible. The overriding constraint on Soames’ powers was to avoid antagonizing ZANU and ZANLA to the point of them rejecting the ceasefire arrangements and breaking from the Lancaster House agreement.

The abuses committed by ZANLA of the agreed upon demobilization and campaign rules were so extensive, however, that Soames at first refused to allow Mugabe, along with hundreds of ZANU political delegates, permission to return to Salisbury to campaign before the election. As leverage to get the ZANLA forces to conform to the rules, Soames used his power to authorize whether or not planes designated to transport ZANU leaders could take off from Maputo. On January 8, Soames informed the British in Maputo that he had approved the arrival of a 20 member ZANU advance party to arrive in Salisbury by the end of the week. Soames did, however, say that he was still not changing his position on “the arrival of large contingents of ZANU members before there has been full compliance by ZANLA with the requirements of the ceasefire. There are still very difficult problems with ZANLA in the Eastern districts.”⁷

While the election campaigning got underway, Lord Carrington met in London with US ambassador to Britain, Kingman Brewster, to discuss the situation in Rhodesia. Carrington sent an account of his meeting with Ambassador Brewster to Nicholas Henderson, the British ambassador in Washington. Carrington expressed his concern that Brewster was only preoccupied with actions taken by Lord Soames and the British that would hurt Mugabe’s chances of winning the elections. “I observed that all the items in Brewster’s catalogue pointed in the same direction. He had not referred to a single matter in which the PF [ZAPU] were to blame.”

⁶ Soames [Salisbury] to Maputo, “Your Telegram Number 37: Rhodesia ZANU,” January 8, 1980, item 27A, FCO 36/2679, BNA.

⁷ Ibid.

Carrington elaborated how Brewster “had not taken account of the fact that, for example, there were perhaps up to 6,000 ZANLA guerillas still outside the assembly areas: that Mugabe had failed so far to release 71 political detainees; that daily breaches of the ceasefire by the PF were still occurring.”⁸ Carrington responded to Brewster with the same “walking a tightrope” idiom he had previously used at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka with President Khama. “I said that the truth was that the Governor was walking a tightrope. He was in the middle of a very difficult situation and being blamed from all sides. This constant sniping was causing us some irritation.” Carrington stressed with Brewster that Nkomo in particular had “come good.” “We had serious problems with Mugabe If Mugabe continued to break the agreement and if he incited his followers to violence, we would face very strong pressure to ban him from the election.” All the same, Carrington let Brewster know that Soames would have a “graduated response” to Mugabe’s infractions.⁹

By the end of January, the South Africans were, along with others, increasingly willing to accept the reality that Muzorewa would not win the election on his own, and that the best possibility, in their opinion, remained hope of a Nkomo–Muzorewa coalition if none of the parties could win an outright majority. Speaking with German diplomat Wilhelm Haas on January 25, 1980, the South Africans learned that the Germans “shared the British Government’s view that no one party could win the election and that the likelihood was that there would be a post-election alliance between Nkomo and Muzorewa.” The South Africans were also told that the “German Embassy in South Africa had reported that our government held a similar view and was ‘no longer’ of the opinion that Bishop Muzorewa would receive an over-all majority.”¹⁰ It is important to note that the Germans were not predicting a Mugabe landslide, showing the extent to which Mugabe and ZANU’s victory by such large margins was not predicted by the Europeans, nor the Anglo-Americans, nor the South Africans.¹¹

⁸ Carrington to Ambassador Washington, DC, “Call by U.S. Ambassador: Rhodesia,” January 23, 1980, item 1, FCO 36/2874, BNA.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ No. K5 Sevret 19h Labushagne, 15.1.1980, 1/156/7, vol. 2, Rhodesia, Foreign Policy and relations with, vol. 3, DFA Archives.

¹¹ For the discussions between the British and South Africans after Mugabe’s victory, see David Moore and Timothy Scarnecchia, “South African Influences in Zimbabwe: From Destablization in the 1980s to Liberation War Solidarity in

South African Strategies before the Zimbabwe Election

A diplomatic problem that resurfaced in January 1980 was the continued presence of South African troops in Rhodesia. The most visible concern was the continued presence of a company of these troops at the Beitbridge crossing, but, as noted above, there were many more South African troops still embedded into Rhodesian Army companies elsewhere in the country. The British mentioned on January 11, for example, that “apart from the company at Beitbridge, the three companies near the south-eastern border are 85 per cent South African.”¹² Governor Soames indicated that he and his advisors were working to convince General Walls of “the need to do something about the South Africans,” but he also indicated that a higher priority was “our continuing attempt to educate them [Walls and the NJOC] out of their desire to see early action against ZANU(PF).”¹³

Viewed from a South African perspective, South African troop presence can be seen as part of a larger strategy attempting to force the PF to break the ceasefire and pull out of the elections scheduled for February. In January 1980, a detailed discussion was presented on the “total war” strategy in southern Africa.¹⁴ The total war strategy in Rhodesia involved, at this stage in January 1980, working with “the UANC, the Rhodesian Front party, and moderate political parties in Rhodesia and the Rhodesian security forces” to wage “a coordinated total war against the PF, Botswana and Zambia.” The document recommended that the South African military needed to remain prepared to intervene should this strategy lead to an escalated conflict.¹⁵

Their specific plan for Rhodesia also included influencing the British government “to do everything in their power to thwart the PF’s efforts to win the election.” They also wanted to “encourage and fully exploit” the use of “Bishop Muzorewa’s auxiliary forces to politicize the

the 2000s,” in Arrigo Pallotti and Ulf Engel, eds., *South Africa after Apartheid: Policies and Challenges of the Democratic Transition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 179.

¹² Soames [Salisbury] to FCO, “Rhodesia: South African Forces,” January 11, 1980 FCO 36/2790, BNA.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Die Strategiese implikasies tov Rhodesie in die konteks van Suider-Afrika asook die huidige en verwagte korttermyn verwikkelinge” [The Strategic Implications of Rhodesia in the Context of Southern Africa as well as the Current and Expected Short-Term Developments], January 28, 1980, H SAW 168, Group 3, Rhodesia III, SADF Archives, Pretoria.

¹⁵ Ibid.

population,” which could lead to “the boycott of the election by PF parties.”¹⁶ In addition, their goal was to do “everything possible . . . to deprive the PF of its political power base by pushing a wedge between the ZAPU and ZANU elements.” One other issue familiar to apartheid South African military “special ops” in Southern Africa noted that “criminal military action that cannot be relegated to the RSA must be carried out within Rhodesia at [against] the PF.” For the South African soldiers stationed at Beitbridge, the strategy dictated that these troops “must under no circumstances be withdrawn as their presence in Rhodesia may lead to the boycott of the election by the PF. The political implications of an RSA military presence in Rhodesia must be known.” This sort of strategy discussion demonstrates the South African hope that they could still derail the Lancaster House agreement by forcing the PF to pull out of the agreement over the issue of South African troops at Beitbridge and elsewhere in Rhodesia leading up to the elections. When the British became aware of just how many South African soldiers were in Rhodesia, Carrington advised that the British “recommend that [General Peter] Walls ‘Rhodesianizes’ the 3 companies of South African troops present in the country.”¹⁷

In a message to the South African ambassador at the end of January, Soames recounts how, when he met with Walls, he was informed that the South Africans were not willing to cooperate over the issue of South African troops in Rhodesia. However, Soames did note that Walls now understood the importance of working out a compromise with Nkomo. Soames explained that “[t]he difficulties we have had over this issue, reflect, however, the much deeper anxieties of the South Africans and of the Rhodesian establishment about the possibility of a PF victory in the elections.” Soames suggested that a solution was still available for the British to influence the South Africans: “We must *inter alia* try to educate the South Africans away from regarding the PF still as a united party and towards the idea – which is now accepted by Walls – that in many ways the best solution would be a coalition involving Muzorewa, Nkomo and the whites.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ FCO to Cape Town, “MPIT: South African Forces,” January 15, 1980, item 98, FCO 36/2791, BNA.

¹⁸ Soames Salisbury to FCO, “Rhodesia: South African forces,” January 25, FCO 36/2791, BNA.

The South African Defence Forces Archives contain handwritten notes from a meeting with Britain's Sir Anthony Duff on January 16. Pik Botha is identified as the South African representative at the meeting. The notes reveal interesting perspectives from both sides. Botha seemed to imply that the South African troop presence issue was nonnegotiable, and that it would have in any case have to be decided by Carrington and South African defence minister, Magnus Malan. Botha did, however, ask Duff, "Will we get a SWA advantage out of this?"¹⁹ This implied that perhaps there was room to negotiate troop withdrawals for greater British cooperation over the South West Africa/Namibia negotiations. The problem of the three South African companies in Rhodesia was delicate. As more and more people became aware of their presence, it was only a matter of time before those at the United Nations who were upset about the South African forces at Beitbridge discovered that there were thousands of additional South African soldiers wearing Rhodesian uniforms on the Mozambican border. The notes indicate that Duff suggested "a fuller Rhodesianisation [sic] of those forces." But the South Africans responded that this would create a problem among the South African military with "morale" if they had to be led by Rhodesian officers, and also, from the British perspective, if parliament would become aware of this subterfuge, then Carrington and Soames would be called out on it.²⁰ Despite this South African troop dilemma, Duff also informed the South Africans the news that, although they planned to "take firm action against Mugabe," the British were "not likely to ban Mugabe" from the election: "We are trying to avoid a war before [the] election." The notes also indicate that Duff told the South Africans that whatever actions would be taken against Mugabe for electoral violations were going to be "defer[ed] until after election especially if we can get Nkomo included in ZR government."²¹

A few days later, Malan wrote an official response to Governor Soames detailing why South Africa could not remove their troops from Rhodesia prior to the election, including "the fact that the cease-fire has not been successfully implemented in Rhodesia" and "the continued presence of Mozambican troops in Rhodesia." He told the British that if they were to push the issue of troop withdrawals, South

¹⁹ Handnotes Rhodesia meeting January 28, 1980, page 4, 4 H SAW 168, Group 3 Rhodesia III, SADF Archives, Pretoria.

²⁰ Ibid. ²¹ Ibid.

Africa would not only remove their personnel, but also that “their equipment and all equipment on loan to assist with the elections, will be withdrawn.” Malan also stated that the “British Government must accept responsibility for any refugees should a situation develop where Rhodesian citizens are forced to seek refuge within the RSA.”²² Malan then reassured the British that South Africa will “continue to provide assistance to the British Governor in Rhodesia in the interest of the safety of the peoples of that country, and in order to ensure that free elections take place.” He also stressed that the “South African Government will, however, not tolerate any humiliation whatsoever, whether by means of a United Nations resolution during the following Security Council Debate on 30 January 1980, or otherwise.” Malan said if such humiliation occurred, the South Africans “reserved the right to withdraw all troops and equipment forthwith and unconditionally, although their presence had previously been agreed to mutually.” The letter ended by stating that the South African government “wishes to give the assurance that it in no way intends to embarrass the British Government.”²³ This South African pressure most likely influenced the decision by the United Kingdom’s United Nations mission to avoid being present during the United Nations Security Council’s unanimous 14–0 vote condemning South Africa’s continued military role in Zimbabwe during the election campaign.²⁴

Malan had sent to Soames an extensive list of “weapons and accessories.” The list corresponds to the one sent to Prime Minister P. W. Botha by Bishop Muzorewa in December 1979. That list, included personnel requests for “six infantry companies with support personnel and equipment; seven fixed wing transport aircraft and eleven helicopters and crew; and, various other personnel attached to

²² Malan, Chief of South African Defense Forces to Governor Soames, January 30, 1980, 2 H SAW 168, Group 3, Rhodesia III, SADF Archives, Pretoria. Appendix listing weapons on loan to Rhodesia is attached to Chief of DA Defence Force to Governor of Rhodesia, “Acknowledgement in Respect of South African Troops and Equipment Present in Rhodesia,” January 30, 1980, Rhodesia III, H SAW 3 158, SADF Archives, Pretoria.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ UN Security Council, “Question Concerning the Situation in Southern Rhodesia,” Resolution 463 (1980) of February 2, 1980. “One member (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) did not participate in the voting.” Since the resolution was adopted 14–0, this meant that the United States supported the resolution.

ZR units.”²⁵ The extensive amount of guns and ammunition included in the request indicate that Muzorewa and his government were ready to return to war if the transition period did not hold and the war started again.

The Patriotic Front before the Election

One year earlier, in January 1979 and well before the Lancaster House conference was even deemed possible, the US ambassador to Zambia, Stephen Low, had reported that there was a lot of talk amongst observers in Lusaka and Dar es Salaam of “the likelihood of a civil war between ZANU and ZAPU, in the event of a Smith collapse.” According to Low’s view of the matter, “there seems to be more of a refusal to admit the existence of something for which no answer has been worked out.”²⁶ Almost a year later, at the end of 1979 and after the Lancaster House agreement had been signed, talk of the PF contesting the first election as a coalition of ZAPU and ZANU had quickly evaporated. Nkomo, in his autobiography, says that he was literally left in the cold by Mugabe, as the ZANU team, including Mugabe, had already left for Dar es Salaam when Nkomo turned up at Mugabe’s flat for what was to be their first meeting after Lancaster to discuss joint PF election plans.²⁷

Mugabe gave a public indication that ZANU would not work with ZAPU for the election during a press conference in Dar es Salaam on

²⁵ Muzorewa wrote to P. W. Botha: “I therefore on behalf of my government, request that you consider extending the period for both the equipment on loan and the attachment of SADF personnel, as reflected in the attached schedule, to other ZR Security Forces until the end of February 1980.” Letter from “Prime Minister of Zimbabwe Rhodesia to Honorable Prime Minister P. W. Botha,” dated December 1979 (no day provided), H SAW 168, Group 3, Rhodesia III, SADF Archives, Pretoria. The list of major equipment on loan included “32 Alouette helicopters, 2 Dakota aircraft, 5 Cessna aircraft, 28 Eland armoured cars, 15 Freeret reconnaissance cars, 149 mine protected vehicles, 31 troop carrying vehicles, 8 140 mm guns, 4 88 mm guns, 12 20 mm guns, 270 12.7mm machine guns; 2,261 sub machine guns, 100 .303 Browning machine guns, 766 light machine guns, 4 anti-aircraft guns; 21,200 automatic rifles, 12 air to air missiles.” H SAW 168, Group 3, Rhodesia III, SADF Archives, Pretoria.

²⁶ Fm American Embassy Lusaka to Secretary of State, “Rhodesia: Some Current Zambian Views,” January 13, 1979, 1979LUSAKA00129, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–76, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

²⁷ Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984), 200.

December 24. Asked whether the PF would run a joint election campaign as a single ticket, Mugabe said, “The general view within the party was . . . perhaps that we pool results rather than try to attempt a merger at this stage which will give rise to several contradictions . . . if we feel we can win better by fighting as two separate parties with perhaps some understanding at the end of it we’ll do precisely that.”²⁸ The ellipses were in the original text, and the summary says that they had a copy of a tape of Mugabe’s press conference. The direct quote above therefore appears to be a fairly accurate account of what Mugabe said, rather than a summary. Interestingly, there was still some hedging in Mugabe’s account.

Mugabe’s press conference occurred two days before the death of ZANLA’s commander Josiah Tongogara. Two months earlier, while in London for the Lancaster House talks, Tongogara had done a long interview with Mozambican journalist Alves Gomes, on October 29, 1979. In that interview, Gomes mentioned that the PF leaders had been saying they would run in the election “as one party.” Gomes asked Tongogara how this would look, given that there was still ZANU and ZAPU. Tongogara argued, “The Patriotic Front embraces the 2 companies, ZAPU and ZANU, and we have formed this not because we are going to go to Geneva, or Malta, Dar es Salaam, and London. We formed in order to achieve national unity.” Tongogara’s position was contrary to what was commonly known; that the PF was formed primarily for diplomacy. Alves asked again, “So you will run the election as only one party[?]” Tongogara said, “Sure, we are seeking an agreement under the Patriotic Front and we will go back as the Patriotic Front. That’s all.”²⁹

Cephas Msipa, an important founding member of ZAPU, describes in his memoir the scene in Salisbury at the end of December when the first ZANLA and ZIPRA leaders returned to organize for the election. Msipa was in charge of escorting both the ZANLA and ZIPRA leaders from the airport to the university where they were to stay. He recalled

²⁸ From Dar es Salaam to FCO, “Press Conference by Mr Mugabe,” December 24, 1979, item 108, FCO36/2409, BNA.

²⁹ “Interview with Comandante Tongogara Alves Gomes,” October 29, 1979, item 96, FCO 36/2679, BNA. The accompanying account in the FCO files states that a different version of this interview was published in the *Guardian* on November 3, 1979. This was a translation of the Portuguese version published in *Tempo* magazine in Maputo on November 11, 1979. The description notes, “Surprisingly they are different.”

that Enos Nkala failed to show up at the airport to escort the ZANLA leaders. Msipa remembered not seeing Tongogara among the ZANLA leaders who arrived from Mozambique and that was his first knowledge that Tongogara had died a few days before. Msipa told how shocked ZAPU leaders, including Nkomo, were to hear of Tongogara's death. "It was thought that Nkomo's chances as co-leader of the Patriotic Front in the coming election would have been better had Tongogara been alive." According to Msipa, it was soon after this that ZANU's Enos Nkala, Nkomo's arch-rival, announced publicly that ZANU would run in the election separately from ZAPU.³⁰

In February 1980, British diplomats at the United Kingdom's United Nations mission in New York, described an interview with ZANU-PF's representative to the United Nations, Tirivafi John Kangai. Kangai was reportedly in good spirits and very optimistic about ZANU's chances in the first election. "He expected 55 seats at worst, 60 at best." This was not a bad prediction, as ZANU would gain fifty-seven seats in the election. A key point was made by Kangai to explain why ZANU decided to run without Nkomo and ZAPU in the Patriotic Front. Kangai emphasized that the decision had been made by Mugabe. "The reason why Mugabe had insisted on fighting the election separately from Nkomo was the need for the electorate to show unequivocally whom they wanted as the leader of an independent Zimbabwe." Kangai added, "But once he had won the election Mugabe would ask Nkomo to form a coalition 'in order to avoid a civil war.'" The FCO's assistant under-secretary for Africa, Philip Mansfield, who interviewed Kangai, asked him if "Mugabe would be prepared to offer Nkomo the job of Prime Minister for a limited period given his seniority." Kangai refused, adding, "It would be impossible to trust Nkomo sufficiently. But he would be offered the Presidency, a prestigious post."³¹ Vesta Sithole, in her account of her life and that of her husband Ndabaningi Sithole, mentioned that everyone was surprised to hear Mugabe was going to run alone, especially Joshua Nkomo. She said Mugabe wanted to run with the ZANU party name, but Reverend Sithole went to court to claim ZANU as his party's name, so Mugabe had to accept using the

³⁰ Cephas Msipa, *In Pursuit of Freedom and Justice: A Memoir* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2015), 90–92.

³¹ P. R. A. Mansfield to C. D. Powell, Rhodesia Dept, FCO. "Rhodesia: ZANU (PF)," item 115, FCO 36/2679, BNA.

ZANU-PF name, while ZAPU ran as PF-ZAPU.³² Therefore, ZAPU was often referred to as the “PF” at this time, although they were, of course, no longer part of a united front with ZANU for the election.

The Elections Observed

On February 25, 1980, Governor Soames circulated a directive to all British ambassadors and high commissioners in the Frontline States to announce his decision not to ban ZANU for election abuses, even though there was clear evidence of ZANU intimidation of voters. A few days before the voting was to begin, Soames instructed British diplomats to share his decision with their counterparts in the Frontline State governments. His instructions stated that it was unlikely he would wish to “make use of the power to disqualify a party in any administrative district: or to decide that the elections cannot be held in any district.” Soames added, “It should be made clear that I have taken this decision despite the extensive intimidation by ZANLA, which has rendered it impossible for Nkomo and Muzorewa to campaign in certain areas.” Soames explained that his decision was “based on the consideration that any action of this kind is liable to be regarded as arbitrary.” He did not wish to “give external critics, and particularly the Front Line Presidents, any excuse to argue that the elections are not free and fair.”³³

This decision infuriated Rhodesian general Peter Walls, who had been complaining to the British throughout the campaign period of ZANU-PF intimidation. General Walls would then try to directly reach out to Thatcher and Carrington in a rather famous letter he wrote on March 1, 1980. Walls claimed that he had been betrayed by Thatcher and Carrington, who had told him at the time of Lancaster House that he would have a final veto if he thought the elections and transition process were not going to plan. In the letter to Thatcher, Walls lambasted Governor Soames for being “incapable of implementing the solemn promise,” given by Soames and Carrington, “that he would rely on us for advice on military and other situations, and act in accordance with the interests of survival of a moderate, freedom-loving and anti-marxist

³² Vesta Sithole, *My Life with an Unsung Hero* (Bloomington: Author House, 2006), 119.

³³ Soames [Salisbury] to FCO, “My Telno 804: Rhodesian Elections,” February 25, 1980, item 1, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

society.” Walls went on to suggest that he would have to make contingency plans if it turned out that Mugabe and ZANU would win the election outright. He asked Thatcher to act in response to this scenario: “it is vital to our survival as a free nation that you declare the election null and void on the grounds of official reports of massive intimidation frustrating the free choice of the bulk of the people.” Walls concluded his letter by noting that “it must be without precedent or at least abnormal, for a person like myself to address such a message as this to no less than the Prime Minister of Britain.” Walls said, “I do so only in the extremity of our possible emergency, with goodwill, and in the sincere and honest belief that it is my duty in terms of the privileged conversations I had with you and Lord Carrington.” Walls signed off his letter to Thatcher with “I don’t know how to sign myself, but I hope to remain your obedient servant.”³⁴

Mugabe did overwhelmingly well in the election, winning fifty-seven seats in parliament. Nkomo received twenty seats in Parliament, but his votes came almost exclusively from populations in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. By the end of polling on February 27, Soames called for a meeting with Mugabe. Soames’ record of that meeting reflected his impatience with ZANU, although it was clear by this point that the British were not going stand in the way of ZANU’s victory no matter how many reports of intimidation and ceasefire violations they received. After Mugabe had complained to Soames “that literally thousands of his men had been picked up lately by the police,” Soames disagreed and thought that the 5,000 arrests Mugabe had claimed in a letter to Carrington was a “gross exaggeration.”

After “a short disagreement on the subject,” Soames told Mugabe that he was “most displeased” with the intimidation by Mugabe’s people in eastern and central Zimbabwe. “Though I agreed that things had been done by other people as well, the hard fact was that intimidation by ZANLA was of a totally different order.” Soames then let Mugabe know that there would not be any serious efforts by the British to punish ZANU for the many violations recorded before and during the election period, telling Mugabe, “But nevertheless I thought it was in Rhodesia’s interest to allow the elections to go on without any move to proscribe any areas, although I could not and would not lightly

³⁴ “General Peter Walls letter to Margaret Thatcher,” March 1, 1980, item 216. PREM 19/346, www.margareththatcher.org/document/120938.

forget what had happened in those areas.” Soames summarized Mugabe’s response, that “he was glad to hear that I was not going to take any action on proscription. He agreed that there had been intimidation by his people but he thought that the order of intimidation was Muzorewa first, himself second and Nkomo a close third.”³⁵

Mugabe then discussed some possible coalitions after the elections, stating that “he thought that the most natural coalition for him would be with Nkomo, but his present thinking was that he would be perfectly ready to invite Muzorewa also and some of his people to join the government with him.” Mugabe related how it would take time to make a transition, and that he knew “that some people regarded him as an ogre but he wasn’t. He did not want anyone to feel that they had to leave the country, but there would need to be, and be seen to be, a growing degree of Africanisation, particularly in the civil service.”

Mugabe shared with Soames that he “had many anxieties about how he was going to govern in the immediate future for he realised that he did not have many people of experience or with administrative skills around him.” The conversation turned to the timing of independence. Mugabe told Soames, “Independence should not be granted for many months and the British governor and his staff should stay, chiefly in order to give confidence to the people.” Soames bluntly replied that this was not in their minds at all, and nor did he see “what role the governor could play once the government had been chosen and was in the saddle.” Mugabe then asked Soames how long he thought there would be between the formation of the government and independence. Soames said that “it should be counted in days or perhaps a week, but not much longer. Mugabe said he “hoped it would be at least months.”³⁶ Even though Soames clearly wanted to close up British operations in Zimbabwe, Soames and the British would agree with Mugabe’s request for a British team to stay on through May.

Although Soames had told Mugabe earlier that he was aware of a great deal of violations by ZANU, he nevertheless downplayed such news in his public statements during the election. Soames would later report on the first day of polling: “A carnival atmosphere has been reported from many of the polling stations and long queues have

³⁵ Salisbury (Soames) to FCO, “Meeting with Mugabe,” February 27, 1980, item 114, FCO36/2679, BNA.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

formed. (A queue two and a half kilometers long was reported from Chibi.) The security situation has been very peaceful.”³⁷ Soames conveyed similarly upbeat reports for Mashonaland Central and West, with an emphasis on the “jovial” mood of queuing voters in both important provinces. For Mashonaland East, however, he stated that “[r]eports from Mtoko and Mrewa indicated that intimidation appeared to be building up in the area.”³⁸

In order to assure a positive stamp of approval from election observers, the FCO put a call out to British diplomats in Europe to help shepherd through the election observer mission’s reports written by various European observers. For example, the British obtained a promise from Danish “Ambassador Jeorgensen . . . without commitment, to discuss with the foreign minister the possibility that he or the Prime Minister might issue a statement on the lines we requested.” The report went further to suggest that the British had requested that such statements would be positive about the electoral process: “Speaking in strict confidence Jeorgensen mentioned that the two Danish election observers were having difficulty in reading [reaching] a joint view. He hinted that the MFA will do its best to ensure that any unhelpful findings will be toned down before release.”³⁹

On the third and final day of voting, February 29, Soames described reports of intimidation, but framed the reports in terms of a bias inherent in the way Rhodesians complained of observed intimidation. He argued that the main observer groups’ acceptance of the election and campaign process as having met the standards of a “free and fair” election was of greater importance: “Voting has ended. The British Parliamentary group have this evening issued a unanimous statement in which they conclude that ‘the election results will fairly reflect the general wish of the Zimbabwean electorate.’” After listing a positive response from “an Irish observer . . . the leader of the New Zealand team, . . . Commonwealth observer group and the Catholic Justice and

³⁷ From Salisbury (Soames) to FCO, “Your Telno 605 (Not to all): Election Summary,” February 27, 1980, item 3, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

³⁸ *Ibid.* For the many different perspectives on the elections, see David Caute, *Under the Skin: The Death of White Rhodesia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1983), 383–426.

³⁹ From Copenhagen to FCO, “Your Telno 394 to Washington: Rhodesia: Elections,” February 27, 1980, item 2, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

Peace Commission,” Soames concluded, “We have no reason to believe that any objective observers will report otherwise.”⁴⁰

Soames went on to downplay complaints from Zimbabwe-Rhodesia authorities, noting that British election observers stationed in the regions where the Rhodesians had complained the most of intimidation: “With only a few exceptions they have said that the Rhodesian reports are exaggerated.”⁴¹ Relieved that the voting had finished without major incident, Soames held a press conference following the closing of the polls and reiterated the need for the international community to remember how the election “has been fought in the aftermath of a cruel war with an imperfect ceasefire and with deep political difficulties and reports of intimidation and other malpractice.” Soames admitted that some of the reports were serious but he then pointed out how, for the most part, the election went forward with “a surprising degree of tranquillity and good humour,” and that “many countries could be proud to have had elections such as these.”⁴²

After the election, Soames reiterated British concerns regarding the need to keep whites from continuing to exit the country. Soames seemed satisfied that the British handling of the election had gone a long way to stop the exodus of whites, but more importantly, Mugabe’s ability to show himself as a champion of reconciliation and cooperation had gone further in this regard. Soames remarked that he was pleased with Mugabe’s decision to retain General Walls to oversee the creation of a new national army and include a few white ministers in his cabinet. “So far – by putting Walls in charge of the integration of the armies, and by appointing David Smith and [Denis] Norman to his cabinet – he [Mugabe] has done enough to encourage most of them to continue to give him the benefit of the doubt.” Soames was pleased to

⁴⁰ From Salisbury (Soames) to FCO, “My Telno 575: Rhodesia: Election Round-up 29 February,” February 29, 1980, item 10, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

⁴¹ Soames provided the following information gathered from British observers: “Victoria Province: Not as bad as feared in Bikita but there is strong evidence of intimidation in Gutu. Mashonaland East: In Mtoko and Mrewa *muji*bas are active, the population are relaxed and there is evidence of herding by ZANLA of voters to polling stations further away than necessary. Manicaland: Security force reports are exaggerated in Marenke and Mutasa but voters have appeared sullen (which suggests intimidation) in Inyanga. Midlands: Heavy intimidation in Belingwe and Selukwe. Matabeleland South: Hardly any intimidation.” *Ibid.*

⁴² From Salisbury (Soames) to FCO, “Rhodesia: the Elections,” February 29, 1980, item 9, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

report that Mugabe still considered him, and the British more generally, as an ally. "At the moment he seems to feel that we are at present the most effective friends he has. We must make the most of the opportunity this offers while the feeling lasts, and before the inevitable communist and third-world diplomatic presence has established itself here and gets to work with him."⁴³

The official British statement on the elections was issued from the Paymaster General's office on March 7, 1980. The self-congratulatory statement showed how important the successful transition and election was to the British, and for the Conservative Party more specifically. "The Government has scored a major success in achieving a peaceful solution to the Rhodesia problem, which has defeated efforts of successive Governments over the last 15 years."⁴⁴ The statement then addressed Conservative Party members who were rather dismayed by Mugabe's victory. "The landslide victory for Mr Robert Mugabe was not perhaps what some sections of British opinion would have wanted, but we committed ourselves to holding free and fair elections, seeing whom the people of Rhodesia wished to lead them, and handing over power to those people." The statement reassures Conservative Party supporters that Mugabe is not the "afro-communist" he was previously portrayed as, and that the Lancaster House constitution would protect whites in the new Zimbabwe. The statement emphasized that "Mr. Mugabe has everything to gain from proceeding in a measured and careful way, including Nkomo's party and some whites in his Government, and doing everything he can to keep members of the white community in Rhodesia to contribute to the country's economic welfare." Finally, the announcement emphasized that Mugabe and ZANU were no friends of the Soviets. "Mugabe owes no political debts to the Soviet Union: his support during the guerilla war came from China and such countries as Yugoslavia and Romania." The statement added: "The achievement of peace in Rhodesia represents a major defeat for the Russians in that it reduces the opportunities for them to interfere."⁴⁵ The above statement reflects just how relieved the British were about the successful elections and Mugabe's victory. They

⁴³ From Salisbury (Soames) to FCO, "Rhodesia: Mugabe and the Whites," March 12, 1980, item 55, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

⁴⁴ PMG Note 13/80 Paymaster General's Office Privy Council Office 68 Whitehall, "Rhodesia," March 7, 1980, item 43, FCO 36/2696, BNA.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

felt that the terms of the Lancaster House constitution would keep Mugabe and his party committed to the reconciliation project, and, most importantly, it appeared that in contrast to Nkomo, Mugabe's victory greatly reduced the possibility of bringing the Soviets and Cubans into Zimbabwe. The statement closed by expressing how these election results and this British-led transition would promote "efforts to achieve peaceful solution to other problems in Southern Africa and the wider world. It will also greatly enhance Britain's prestige with our friends among Western and non-aligned countries."⁴⁶

An example of how willing Mugabe was to demonstrate his anti-Soviet mindset comes from an exchange with Soames in early April. As the April 18 Independence Day approached in ten days, Lord Soames and Prime Minister-elect Mugabe met to discuss the details of the transition. Soames told Mugabe that the South African government had agreed to offer two loans, "one of 80 million and one of 85 million Rands" to his government. Soames described Mugabe as having "appreciated the favourable terms" that were being offered. "He gave me [Soames] the impression that he would write a letter confirming that his government will honour these and the other outstanding loans to the South African Government."⁴⁷ Perhaps to show how grateful he was to the South African government, Soames reported how,

Mugabe added that he told Van Vuuren [the South African Representative in Salisbury] in good faith that there were no armed SAANC [South African ANC] in the country. He had therefore been disturbed to discover on the following day from the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation that there were 87 SAANC with ZIPRA in Assembly camp Juliet. 79 were being returned immediately to Zambia. The other eight are at present in hospital here.

Mugabe then went further to blame Nkomo for their presence. "Nkomo had claimed that he did not know about the SAANC in Juliet, but Mugabe did not believe him. Mugabe made clear that his own relations with the SAANC were distant and was concerned that

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ To FCO from Salisbury (Soames), "Telegram no. 1286," April 8, 1980, item 124, FCO 36/2736, BNA. At the time, these amounts would have been worth approximately \$65 million and \$69 million.



Figure 8 Prime Minister Robert Mugabe with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Lord Carrington. May 9, 1980. Getty Images.

the South Africans should not think that he had been misleading them. He genuinely did not know this.”⁴⁸ Days before the Independence Day ceremonies, Mugabe was positioning himself as the trustful neighbor of South Africa, while castigating Nkomo as the potential problem given his past political and military alliances with the South African ANC.

The Early 1980s

Relations between the United States and Britain and Zimbabwe started out very positively in 1980, particularly given the post-April 1980 independence period and Prime Minister Mugabe’s internationally celebrated image as the great reconciler: the African leader who was willing to forgive whites for the crimes committed against him, his liberation army soldiers, and the people of Zimbabwe. Mugabe travelled to Washington, DC, first to visit President Carter in 1980 and then President Reagan in 1983, and to London to meet with Prime Minister

⁴⁸ Soames concluded, “There is no harm in Para 2 above being drawn on, in strict confidence, with the South Africans.” To FCO from Salisbury (Soames), “Telegram no. 1286,” April 8, 1980, item 124, FCO 36/2736, BNA.

Thatcher in 1981 and 1984. Each time he was publicly praised for his politics of racial reconciliation, which was held up as a model for what a post-apartheid South Africa might look like. There was a great hope that with sufficient foreign aid, British military training, and international goodwill, Zimbabwe could rise up to meet all the high expectations held by the Western powers. Importantly, these expectations centered around a sort of hybrid race state, where white capital and expertise would attract new foreign direct investments, and this would insulate the country from the economic and political shocks experienced in many African states in the early 1980s. The ZIMCORD aid conference in 1981 generated large commitments from Western donors (\$1.95 billion for 1981–1984),⁴⁹ and state-sponsored advances in universal education and medical care began to take off in 1981 and 1982. South African diplomats noted how this compared to earlier promises of aid to help keep white Rhodesians in the country. “At current exchange rates the total aid attracted by Zimbabwe now amounts to US\$1.95 billion. This is more than the US\$1.5 billion suggested – over 5 years – by Dr. Henry Kissinger as part of the 1976 settlement package. Furthermore, the Zimcord aid refers only to a three-year period.”⁵⁰

Early Signs of Tensions in the Zimbabwe National Army

In addition to development aid, the British and Americans were content in this early period to fund integration and training efforts for the Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA) under the guidance of the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT). There were many positive indications of success with the integration process until violence broke out in the ZNA barracks near Bulawayo in November 1980 and February 1981. The violence in February was between ex-ZIPRA and ex-ZANLA in the 12 Battalion. The British high commissioner to Zimbabwe, Robin Byatt, described the situation as still unresolved on February 9, after two days of fighting at Ntabizinduna. According to Byatt, “the trouble began when disabled

⁴⁹ “The Zimcord Conference,” April 6, 1981, SANA DFA 1/156/7, vol. 6 Zimbabwe: Foreign Policy, 10/2/81 to 24/6/81, DFA Archives, Pretoria, South Africa,

⁵⁰ “The Zimcord Conference,” April 6, 1981, SANA DFA 1/156/7, vol. 6 Zimbabwe: Foreign Policy, DFA Archives.

ex-ZIPRA guerrillas from the nearby Kayisa training centre threw stones at ex ZANLA members of 12 Battalion.” After this, the “ex ZIPRA members of the Battalion then joined in and the armouries were broken into.” Noting the role of BMATT officers in training the 12 Battalion, Byatt said that they had been disciplined during the earlier Entumbane disturbances, but since the withdrawal of the BMATT coordinators six weeks earlier, standards had deteriorated. “The CO is a capable, but young (22) ex-ZIPRA officer.”⁵¹ Norma Kriger provides statistics on just how violent these two events were, with 55 people killed in the fighting on November 9–10, 1980 in Entumbane near Bulawayo and in Chitungwiza near Harare. According to Kriger, in the fighting at Entumbane in February 1981, “the understated death toll was 197 – one estimate was that over 300 ex-guerrillas had died – and 1,600 homes were damaged.”⁵² Many ex-ZIPRA members deserted from the ZNA at this point, as, from their perspective, it did not seem possible that ex-ZIPRA soldiers would be treated fairly and equally in the ZNA. Still, the integration efforts by BMATT were seen as a success, as the bulk of ex-ZIPRA remained in the ZNA and funding continued into the mid-1980s. The British believed it was better to fund and direct the formation of the new ZNA rather than allowing Mugabe to look for future support from the Cubans and Soviets.

Mugabe had, however, accepted a “gift” from North Korea in the form of military advisors and supplies for the training of one brigade of the ZNA, the 5 Brigade, consisting of between 2,500 and 3,500 soldiers. Mugabe told the British that he accepted the North Korean offer to form a sort of “presidential guard,” but because the gift came with large amounts of traditional military aid, including tanks and armored vehicles, the decision was made to have the North Korean advisors train the new 5 Brigade for later integration with the four existing ZNA brigades trained by BMATT officers. The British rationalized that at least it was not the Soviets or Cubans who were involved, and therefore did not put up much resistance to the North Korean training. It also let them off the hook in terms of responding to Mugabe’s request for training a “presidential guard.” The gift had been announced by

⁵¹ Salisbury to FCO, “My Telno 44: Internal Situation,” February 9, 1981, PREM 19/606, BNA.

⁵² Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980–1987* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79.

minister of state for national security, Emmerson Mnangagwa, as a North Korean advanced party arrived in Harare on May 21, 1981.⁵³

High Commissioner Byatt wrote positively about the political atmosphere in his May 1981 summary report of BMATT's role, noting that the "[t]ensions between Mugabe's and Nkomo's party, and fears that the latter might break the uneasy coalition, have receded." He did, however, question the ZNA's capabilities. He noted that half of ZIPRA and ZANLA had "gone through basic amalgamation training, but the army which is being produced remains insufficiently trained and poorly organised."⁵⁴ Commenting on the ex-ZIPRA and ex-ZANLA violence in the Entumbane suburb of Bulawayo in November 1980 and February 1981, Byatt said that "it was notable that the leadership of ZIPRA and ZANLA, who do not see eye to eye over integration policy, did their best to dampen the trouble down and that eleven of the fourteen battalions existing at the time were unaffected." Byatt was optimistic about the reintegration process, although he did hint that there could be difficulties as holdouts for both liberation war armies still had access to weapon caches, specifically "the last ZIPRA and ZANLA redoubts at Gwai Mine and Middle Sabi respectively." Significant to future accusations about arms caches, Byatt added that "[n]o one believes that units hand over all their weapons when ordered to do so, and there are undoubtedly many secret arms caches around the country."⁵⁵

On February 27, 1981, BMATT reported on the potential flash point at Gwai Mine where there were still 5,000 to 6,000 demobilized ZIPRA soldiers, and noted that "ZIPRA are thought to be caching arms in this area."⁵⁶ A summary of events in 1980 and 1981 from a BMATT perspective mentions that both sides were likely storing weapons, including ex-ZANLA at Middle Sabi.⁵⁷ The reporting officer suggested

⁵³ From Britdefad Salisbury to MoDUK, "FCO/Seoul Tel 41 of 27 Mar. North Korean Military Assistance," May 20, 1981, item 1, FCO106/464, BNA.

⁵⁴ British High Commissioner at Salisbury to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, "Zimbabwe: The Military Scene and the Role of BMATT," May 14, 1981, DEFE 11/932, BNA.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ BRITDEFAD Salisbury to MODUK, "Sitrep No 41 (17–26 February 1981)," DEFE 11/932, Zimbabwe, BNA.

⁵⁷ British High Commissioner at Salisbury to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, "Zimbabwe: the Military Scene and the Role of BMATT," May 14, 1981, DEFE 11/932, BNA.

that the reintegration of Gwai Mine and Middle Sabi would be difficult: “The ZIPRA forces at Gwai now balances to ZANLA forces at mid Sabi. Both are heavily armed.”⁵⁸ There was, then, sufficient evidence of possible further showdowns between ex-ZIPRA and ex-ZANLA soldiers, which could have been much more significant than the earlier conflicts in 1980 and 1981, given Byatt’s suggestion that a standoff among the two former fighters could involve between 5,000 to 6,000 soldiers on both sides. This is important, as the accusations discussed below that would surface in February 1983 to discredit Nkomo and ZAPU would suggest that they were caching arms for about 5,000 soldiers. What is often forgotten as the events of 1982 unfolded, and Mugabe accused Nkomo and ZAPU of hiding arms to use for overthrowing his government, was that ex-ZANLA were also caching arms for a potential showdown. Killings of ex-ZIPRA by ex-ZANLA were a fact of life in 1981, as the same report indicates: “ZIPRA (Gwai Mine) have released 398 men who had absented themselves from ZNA BNS [battalions] before the recent Bulawayo troubles. They include 151 men from 43 BN who went absent following the murder of 3 members of that BN by ZANLA 4 months ago.”⁵⁹

Responses to Mugabe’s Removal of Nkomo from Office

In February 1982, the US ambassador to Zimbabwe, Robert Keeley, described to the State Department in Washington, DC the details of Mugabe’s move against Nkomo and ZAPU surrounding the public revelations of hidden arms cachés on ZAPU-owned properties. On February 17, 1982, Mugabe had announced that he was ordering the removal from office and the cabinet of Joshua Nkomo, Josiah

⁵⁸ BRITOEAFAD Salisbury to MODUK, “Sitrep No 41 (17–26 February 1981),” DEFE 11/932 Zimbabwe, BNA.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Kriger notes that Dabengwa, Nkomo, Mnangagwa, and Mugabe had been part of “an ad hoc committee who met in early 1982 to discuss how to handle the arms cachés.” Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans*, 133. Stuart Doran quotes from his 2015 interview with Dumiso Dabengwa that Dabengwa had discussed the arms cachés with Special Branch before it became publicly announced, so it was not such a “discovery” by the government, as portrayed by Mugabe to the press and foreign diplomats. Stuart Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory: Mugabe, ZANU and the Quest for Supremacy, 1960–1987* (Midrand, South Africa: Sithatha Media, 2017), n. 89 (location 17097 of the Kindle edition). See also Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory* (location 1323).

Chinamano and “two other leaders from the Cabinet” for “alleged connection with secret arms cachés.” He would permit other ZAPU members to remain in government. “Nkomo, who had first been Minister of Home Affairs, but demoted to Minister of Public Service in January 1981, was now also charged with secretly and unsuccessfully soliciting South African support for a coup attempt in the months following the 1980 elections.”⁶⁰ At the press conference, Mugabe blamed Nkomo for planning to work with the South Africans to overthrow Mugabe’s government. Mugabe’s source for this information was General Walls, who claimed to have evidence that Nkomo had “asked whether the SAG [South African government] would support him if ZAPU staged a coup against Mugabe, and was both times told no.” Mugabe also said that he had confronted Nkomo about these meetings, and Nkomo had denied them. “Mugabe lamented the ‘dishonesty’ of his coalition partner, and said that ZANU felt cheated by the repeated evidence of Nkomo’s subversive intentions. ‘Now we look foolish, very foolish to have dismissed these rumors, because the man is caught red-handed.’”⁶¹ This is the line that Mugabe would consistently present to diplomats and world leaders over the next few years.

New York Times reporter Joseph Lelyveld covered the expulsion of Nkomo from government in an article entitled “Zimbabwe Showdown,” where he perceptively observed that both Mugabe and Nkomo were posturing around the arms caching issue. Describing how former ZIPRA personnel had been “leading army search teams to buried weapons” for the previous few months, Mugabe had made his case on “the discovery of an additional 600 rifles and 200 heavier weapons, including 7 Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles, to the stockpile of arms previously recovered.” Lelyveld commented, “It was a sizable caché but hardly enough for a coup.” Lelyveld was told by

⁶⁰ Fm AmEmbassy Salisbury, “Mugabe Announces Cabinet Changes; Nkomo Out,” February 18, 1982, Unclassified U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2017-00020, Doc No. C06245987, Date: 05/26/2017, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/y8nfmren>. See also Eliakim Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People’s Union, 1961–87* (Trenton NJ: African World Press, 2005), 250. See Nkomo’s rebuttals and account of these events Nkomo, *The Story of My Life*, 224–34.

⁶¹ Fm AmEmbassy Salisbury, “Mugabe Announces Cabinet Changes; Nkomo Out,” February 18, 1982, Unclassified U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2017-00020, Doc No. C06245987, Date: 05/26/2017, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/y8nfmren>.

former ZIPRA commanders, “that it was buried at the time of last year’s fighting for purely defensive purposes, an explanation that sounds plausible to the most detached analysts but the Prime Minister and his supporters seem to reject out of hand.” Lelyveld summed up the standoff quite well: “It seems more likely that the Prime Minister’s underlying mistrust of Mr. Nkomo, dating back nearly 20 years, merged in some complex fashion with his sense of vulnerability to outside threats and plots, which seem to have been deepening in recent months.”⁶²

For his part, Joshua Nkomo did not take these charges lightly. Ambassador Keeley reported Nkomo’s response: “He [Nkomo] asserted that the PM had never discussed the arms cachés with him (an allegation seemingly supported by an evasive answer Mugabe gave to a question on the same topic at the press conference) nor had he the courtesy to call Nkomo himself and tell him he was out of the Cabinet.”⁶³ At this point in Keeley’s tenure in Zimbabwe – he was the first US ambassador to Zimbabwe, officially starting on May 23, 1980 – Keeley was still very much enamored with Mugabe’s intelligence and political skills. He ended his report on the events of February 1982 with a rather glowing assessment of Mugabe’s skill in handling Nkomo. Keeley wrote how “Mugabe’s performance in this touchy situation was one of his most effective Even while delivering a knockout punch to Nkomo, he did so with velvet gloves, cognizant of the potentially violent reaction of ex-Zipra still loyal to their leader.” Keeley saw Mugabe’s portrayal of South Africa as a potential ally with Nkomo as a smart move, and by keeping Nkomo out of detention, he avoided making Nkomo “a martyr.”⁶⁴

A few weeks later, at the beginning of March 1982, Keeley was still praising Mugabe’s political skills in handling his main rival. “He has shot not to kill, but to cripple Nkomo and to further limit the effectiveness of ZAPU as a political force.” On the role of the ZIPRA arms cachés, Keeley reflected that they were not likely going to be used

⁶² Joseph Lelyveld, “Zimbabwe Showdown: Threat of Conflict Remains,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1982.

⁶³ Fm American Embassy Salisbury, “Mugabe Announces Cabinet Changes; Nkomo Out,” February 18, 1982, Unclassified U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2017-00020, Doc No. C06245987, Date: 05/26/2017, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/y8nfmren>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

offensively by ZIPRA. "We find no conclusive evidence as yet that the ZAPU arms caches were anything more than an insurance policy – a fifth Brigade in the ground – to be used in case ZANU pressures were to increase to violent proportions. Nkomo's role in the caching is unclear." Keeley was also starting to see the limits of Mugabe and ZANU-PF's constant attacks on Nkomo and ZAPU. "Mugabe's ultimate design is no doubt the political elimination of ZAPU on the road to a one-party state. Ironically, his pillorying of Nkomo may delay, rather than advance, that day."⁶⁵

ZANU's Determination to Create a One-Party State

In order to fully understand the intensity of ZANU's attacks on Nkomo and ZAPU, it has to be noted that Mugabe and many of his key ministers wanted to "crush" all opposition parties in order to give ZANU complete control of the country.⁶⁶ Much of this drive came from the examples of Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, and Angola, where Mugabe and others had observed the ways ruling parties had crushed rival politicians and movements in order to dictate the future direction of the country without a meaningful opposition. The Lancaster House agreement had given the white minority a guaranteed number of seats in parliament, but what really added to ZANU's obsession with crushing ZAPU was that ZANU had not been able to break ZAPU's electoral popularity in the Matabeleland provinces and the Midlands. Even ZAPU's showing in the 1980 election had created a threatening

⁶⁵ American Embassy to Secretary of State, "Zimbabwe After Nkomo's Sacking," March 4, 1982, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2017-00020, Doc No. C06245984, Date: 05/26/2017, Department of State, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/y64xfkmy>.

⁶⁶ For detailed evidence of this line of argument, that the violence of Gukuruhundi was foremost political in nature in order to force a ZANU-led one-party state, see David Coltart, *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe*. (Johannesburg: Jacana Media (Pty), 2016); Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory*; Judith Todd, *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 2007); Lloyd Sachikonye, *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe* (United States: Jacana Media, 2011), 15–17; Wendy Urban-Mead, *The Gender of Piety: Family, Faith, and Colonial Rule in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015), 203–24; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Rethinking Chimurenga and Gukuruhundi in Zimbabwe: A Critique of Partisan National History," *African Studies Review* 55, no. 3 (2012), 1–26.

response from ZANU. Right from the start, in 1980, Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa was signaling to any opposition that they were not going to experience the sort of democracy they may have envisioned.

According to British reports, on June 26, 1980, Mnangagwa had “told the House of Assembly yesterday that parties ‘which did not do well in the February [1980] elections’ were foolishly allowing themselves to be part of a conspiracy against Zimbabwe.” The charges at this stage included “deliberate subversive rumour mongering, collaboration with foreign powers to revert the country’s socialist revolution, and external training for sabotage by both military and civilian persons.” Mnangagwa spelled out ZANU’s expectations: “The State did not seek a nation of ‘yes men and women’ but there had not yet been a clear commitment by all to the new system of democracy.” Mnangagwa cautioned “that all those who sought to undermine the authority of the state would be ‘consumed by the fury of the masses and ground to powder by the People’s government.’”⁶⁷ The other outspoken critic of ZAPU’s continued political existence was Enos Nkala, himself an Ndebele, but also a longstanding opponent of Nkomo going back to the days of the ZAPU–ZANU split in 1963. Nkala’s hatred for Nkomo was no secret, and the feelings were mutual. From 1980 until the unity accords of 1987 that finally brought ZAPU into ZANU and formed ZANU-PF, Nkala would attack Nkomo personally in his speeches, and was the demagogue who was not afraid to bring his fight with Nkomo to his home area. Historian Enocent Msindo notes that one of Nkala’s inflammatory speeches in Bulawayo on July 6, 1980, is still remembered as a turning point in the opposition to ZANU and Mugabe’s government for many people. In that speech, Nkala argued “that his duty was now ‘to crush Nkomo and forget about him.’”⁶⁸ By March 1983, the British gave accounts of Nkala speeches, where he “described Nkomo as public enemy number 1, and said that ZAPU would be ‘liquidated.’”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ From Salisbury to FCO, “Internal Situation,” June 26, 1980, PREM 19/606, BNA.

⁶⁸ Nkala quoted in Enocent Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe: Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies, 1860–1990* (University of Rochester Press, 2012), 216.

⁶⁹ From Harare to FCO, “My Telno 178: Matabeleland,” March 7, 1983, item 43/3, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

Nyerere Visits Bulawayo

An indication of just how bad relations were between the two parties, some nine months after independence, can be found in a press account of Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere's visit to Zimbabwe in December 1980. A South African *Rand Daily Mail* account of his visit takes note of the cold reception Nyerere received when in Bulawayo, given that he was accompanied by government ministers Enos Nkala and Emmerson Mnangagwa. The government reportedly cancelled a rally scheduled for President Nyerere at Barbourfield stadium in Bulawayo after only some 2,000 people turned out for it. The reporter indicated that half of the crowd were school children. The reason given for the lack of attendance was the violence that had occurred three weeks previously, where fifty-eight people were reportedly killed in violence between ZAPU and ZANU supporters. "Supporters of Mr Nkomo's Patriotic Front Party have been angered recently by inflammatory remarks by Zanu-PF Ministers – who have denigrated their role in the armed struggle – and the detention of nine senior PF officials." The cancellation of the rally was all the more embarrassing because Prime Minister Mugabe and then minister of home affairs Joshua Nkomo had both accompanied Nyerere to Bulawayo.

The local population's anger was reportedly directed at the "two Zanu-PF Ministers most despised by PF supporters – Senator Enos Nkala, Minister of Finance, and Mr Emmerson Munangagwa [sic], the Minister of State who ordered the arrest of the PF [ZAPU] officials a fortnight ago." After cancelling the rally, "[a]bout 800 people eventually pitched up at the city hall to hear President Nyerere make an impassioned plea for national unity." In his speech, Nyerere "said unity was essential if Zimbabweans did not want to 'betray Africa' and lose the freedom for which they had fought." Nyerere went on to remind the audience of their nation's potential, "Zimbabwe has an economic base which many of us in Africa envy. You start further along the road to development and prosperity (than many others in Africa)." Finally, Nyerere "went out of his way to mention the role played by Mr. Nkomo and his followers in the armed struggle. He said the time for fighting in Zimbabwe was over and that people should now work to consolidate their independence 'and strengthen the border of Africa's freedom which is now at the

Limpopo River.”⁷⁰ This latter point referred to the need to form a united front against apartheid South Africa. The scene, and Nyerere’s words, hint to how Mugabe and ZANU might have used this early transition to build a coalition with ZAPU, but that was not the road Mugabe and ZANU took. The reporter ends the article with Mugabe’s reply to Nyerere’s appeal to unity. “In reply, Mr Mugabe referred to last month’s ‘little war’ in Bulawayo. He said it was a senseless battle between lawless elements versus the rest – and not between Ndebele and Shona.”⁷¹

This was a much more carefully worded response than the one Mugabe would provide Prime Minister Thatcher in October 1981. When asked about the internal situation in Zimbabwe, Mugabe told Thatcher that “Mr. Nkomo was on the whole now being very helpful.” However, he conditioned this by saying, “Immediately after independence relations had not been at all easy.” He then went into his oft-told story of Nkomo’s plans to overthrow his government. Mugabe told Thatcher, “The Soviet Union had continued to give ZAPU weapons and the ZAPU military commanders had tried to overthrow the government. This is why there had been fighting in Bulawayo.” Mugabe was consistent in his messaging to Western leaders that Nkomo was still a potential threat in terms of Soviet influence. He did, however, temper his criticisms of Nkomo privately to Thatcher. “But Mr. Nkomo had always been realistic and had not supported his military colleagues.” Mugabe said of Nkomo, “He was still not a happy man, and to maintain his credibility with his supporters, he had to attack the Government from time to time. But generally there were no serious problems with him.”⁷² This was a much softer description of Nkomo than what he would give over the next three years.

The Fifth Brigade as ZANU’s Force to Attack ZAPU

Robert Keeley remark that ZIPRA’s arms caches were no more than “an insurance policy – a fifth Brigade in the ground – to be used in case ZANU pressures were to increase to violent proportions” points to the increased

⁷⁰ “Nyerere Rally in Bulawayo Is Cancelled,” *Rand Daily Mail*, December 5, 1980.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Call on the Prime Minister by Mr. Robert Mugabe,” October 7, 1981, PREM 19/682, BNA. Also at Margaret Thatcher Archive: 811006 1425 MT-Mugabe (682–73).pdf

sense among diplomats in Harare that while Mugabe may have accepted the North Korean “gift” of training and supplying a new ZNA brigade as a way to create a “Presidential Guard,” he was also creating a fighting force outside of the British BMATT program to be under direct command of ex-ZANLA officers loyal to Mugabe. For the British officials involved in BMATT, the prospects of a private army loyal to Mugabe and ZANU would remain a concern, but as events in early 1983 unfolded the British were quite willing to make the most of the North Korean responsibility for training of the 5 Brigade. The lack of discipline of the 5 Brigade served as a foil to the other four Brigades that had been trained by BMATT. In some ways then, Mugabe’s use of North Korean training and weapons had given the British a way to both remain close and involved with the ZNA while also putting the blame on the North Korean trained brigade for the extreme human rights abuses that were to transpire in 1983.

By September 1982, Ambassador Keeley had now spent sufficient time in Zimbabwe to learn more of the history of the liberation struggle and the years before it. His account to the State Department demonstrates the commonly held ZANU perspective of the struggle between Mugabe and Nkomo, going back to the original 1963 split. Keeley’s account still seemed more or less inspired by what he would have likely heard from ZANU intellectuals and politicians. “There were three elements to the split, at least. One was a rejection of Nkomo as leader because he was considered a dishonest, corrupt person who would make deals to assure his own ascendancy, in other words a ‘sell-out.’” Keeley then repeated the ethnic explanation for the rivalry, “Secondly, there was the tribal division, with Nkomo being considered a tribalist who was working to advance Ndebele and not ‘national’ interests (not entirely true).” At least Keeley now recognized the general weakness of this line, although he eventually would also use the ethnicity argument in his assessment of human rights abuses by the Zimbabwe government. His last point was based on a more racial and personal impression of the two movements: “Thirdly, there was a definite ideological or strategic disagreement, with the ZANU people insisting on going for broke, for absolute black rule, with no deals or compromises with the whites, whereas Nkomo was always open to making a deal with almost anyone, to take half a loaf and then work for the remainder.”⁷³

⁷³ Ambassador Keeley to Secretary of State, “Security Situation in Zimbabwe, Inter-Party Rivalry and Abduction of Amcits,” September 22, 1982, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No.

As previous chapters have shown, this was far from an accurate summary of Nkomo's negotiating style and his commitment to the PF, although ZANU had projected this interpretation since the early *détente* period in 1974–75. Nkomo had insisted on staying with Mugabe in the PF even when it went against his own personal interests. The problem from Nkomo's perspective, of course, was that Mugabe would never agree to take a secondary role. Having won the majority of seats in the 1980 elections, there was now no longer the need for Mugabe to show respect for Nkomo, or to reciprocate in giving Nkomo the respect Nkomo gave Mugabe during the PF period. Mugabe and his colleagues in ZANU would take matters even further, as they would seek to destroy ZAPU as an opposition party in their attempt to gain total control of the political system in Zimbabwe. Keeley's summary more or less reflects the commonly held diplomatic views of the early 1980s. These views were likely representative of the information obtained from his predominantly ZANU-PF contacts and also from many of the other diplomats he encountered in Harare.

As the months went on, however, and certainly after the deployment of the 5 Brigade and the beginning of the *Gukurahundi* period in late January 1983, Keeley and others began to have a much less rosy view of Mugabe and ZANU's campaigns against Nkomo and ZAPU. Even before the deployment of the 5 Brigade, ZANU had continued to report to the press and international diplomats that Nkomo and ZAPU were involved in treason against the state. On April 2, 1982, Keeley reported on a press conference in Bulawayo by Emmerson Mnangagwa held a few days earlier, where Mnangagwa alleged that the Zimbabwe government had "seized military camps in Matabeleland where people were being trained to overthrow the government and arrested those involved." Mnangagwa claimed evidence "connected the secret camps to Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and that some leaders of ZAPU knew about them, and that some of those arrested were "former ZIPRA combatants." In parentheses, Keeley reported that Mnangagwa was "very vague about the numbers involved and the potential significance of the secret training."⁷⁴ Almost two months later, Keeley was downplaying the threat from dissidents in the country as

C05256499, Date 09/24/2013 DoS, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/yb8m4jzz>.

⁷⁴ AmEmbassy Salisbury to SecState WashDC, "Munangagwa finds secret ZIPRA Bases," April 2, 1982, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256453, Date: 09/24/2013 DoS, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/y8hojbz3>.

he was beginning to suggest that ZANU's use of Nkomo and ZAPU as the target of their campaign was at risk of making the situation worse:

The dissident problem is not a major military threat, and in fact, the [Zimbabwe government] may be getting on top of it. However, continued pressure on ZAPU, and particularly on Nkomo, and poor handling of ex-Zipra deserters from the national army might help create the Matabeleland Sea in which dissidents could swim Militarily, the dissident situation appears to be not a major threat.⁷⁵

Two major events changed the tenor of Keeley's reports on the security situation in Zimbabwe in July 1982. One was the July 23 kidnapping and killing of six foreign tourists, including two Americans, two Britons, and two Australians. The second was the sabotage and destruction of Zimbabwe Air Force fighter jets at the Thornhill Air force base on July 25, 1992. Both events brought the Americans and their diplomatic counterparts into closer and more frequent contact with ZANU and ZAPU leaders.⁷⁶ When discussing Nkomo with American diplomats, Mugabe painted a picture of Nkomo as someone unwilling to work to stop the dissidents. Mugabe told Keeley that although "he had tried to involve ZAPU in the government . . . the situation today is that ZAPU could be doing a lot more to help the situation." Mugabe charged Nkomo with the responsibility of stopping dissidents: "These ZAPU 'youngsters' (the dissidents) had been acting in ZAPU's name. In Nkomo's name. Nkomo could stop it. The truth is, Mugabe said, that some of Nkomo's adherents have been encouraging the banditry."⁷⁷ Nkomo, on the other hand, used the

⁷⁵ AmEmbassy Harare to SecState WashDC 5870, "Current Security Update: ZAPU, ZIPRA, and the Soviets," May 24, 1982 Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256456, Date: 09/24/2013 DoS, FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/y87by8lc>.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of how these events informed American diplomacy and relations with Mugabe, see Timothy Scarnecchia, "Rationalizing Gukurahundi: Cold War and South African Foreign Relations with Zimbabwe, 1981-1983," *Kronos* 37, no. 1 (2011); Timothy Scarnecchia, "Intransigent Diplomat: Robert Mugabe and His Western Diplomacy, 1963-83", in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ed., *Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 77-92. For an exceptionally detailed account of these events and years, see Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory*.

⁷⁷ Amb Robert V. Keeley, AmEmbassy Harare to SecState WashDC, "Abduction of Amcits in Zimbabwe: Meeting with PM Mugabe 8.3," August 4, 1982, Unclassified US Dept of State, Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No C05256470, September 24, 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y87by8lc>, as cited in Scarnecchia, "Intransigent Diplomat," 88. For the many complex reasons why dissidents sometimes associated

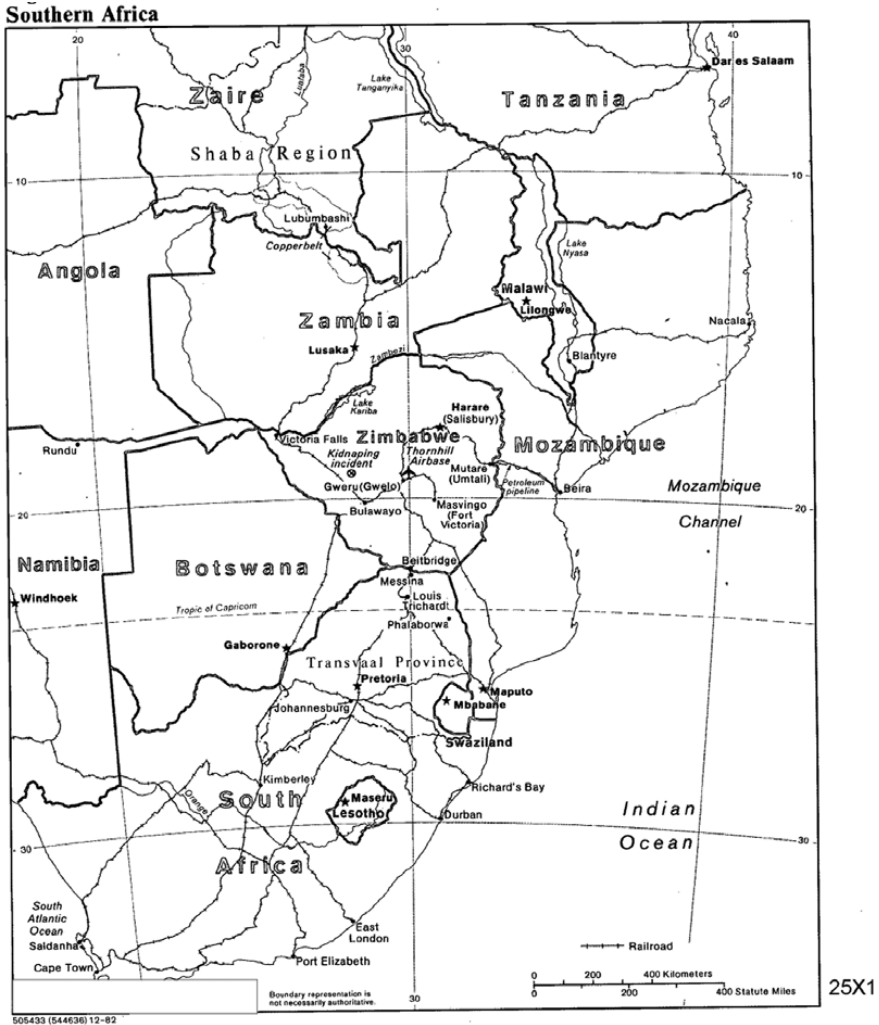


Figure 9 Map of Southern Africa. CIA, "Zimbabwe: Growing Potential for Instability," December 1982.

kidnappings of foreign tourists to demand respect from Mugabe and ZANU in return for his help with trying to locate the kidnapped foreigners.

themselves with ZAPU but without direct connections to Nkomo and other older generation leaders, see Jocelyn Alexander, "Dissident Perspectives on Zimbabwe's Post-Independence War," *Africa* 68, no. 2 (1998), 151–82.

He noted that since he was no longer part of the government, he was unwilling to take a leading role to help the Zimbabwe government that was accusing him of being behind the dissidents and kidnappings.⁷⁸

Mugabe's Meeting with CIA Director William Casey

An example of the closeness between Mugabe and the United States in the first few years of independence is Mugabe's meeting with the head of the CIA, William Casey, who spent a day in Harare on September 28, 1982. Casey met with then CIO director general Derek Robinson and former CIO director general Ken Flowers. Casey discussed with them accusations from South Africa that the Zimbabweans were permitting the South African ANC to enter South Africa. Casey later told Mugabe that he had spoken with both Pik Botha and Magnus Malan the previous day in Pretoria, about the United States "displeasure" over South Africa's "destabilization efforts." Casey told Mugabe, "They didn't deny they were doing that, but said they were retaliating because of operations mounted from Zimbabwe against their country." Robinson denied any such activities. Interestingly, both Casey and Mugabe began the meeting by thanking each other for cooperation on the intelligence front. Mugabe thanked Casey for American "cooperation in developing the Zimbabwean intelligence service."⁷⁹ In reply to the question of Zimbabwean assistance to the South African ANC, Mugabe told Casey that "Zimbabwe supports its African brothers in South Africa morally and diplomatically but not militarily," stating, "On that we have been very clean." Casey agreed with this latter point, according to Keeley's account.

Casey asked Mugabe to comment on the internal situation in the country. Mugabe elaborated for Casey the case against Nkomo and ZAPU: "To be sure there are dissident elements, army deserters, the arms cachés, the abduction of foreign tourists. There have been rapes and murders. All this has been directed against the government." Keeley then summarized Mugabe's account of "recent Zimbabwean history." Mugabe told how [h]is party had won the election and had

⁷⁸ See Scarnecchia, "Intransigent Diplomat."

⁷⁹ Secretary of State, 1982, "William Casey's meeting with Prime Minister Mugabe: Namibia, Zimbabwe-South Africa relations, internal situations, CSM article on Civil Rights," From Secretary of State WashDC to US mission USUN, New York, October 2, Unclassified, US Department of State, Case No. F-20212-29009, Doc No. C0525610, Date 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y9gcpdbe>.

taken power. “ZAPU, having been defeated in the election, had asked the USSR for arms and had received them in Zambia – that was after Lancaster house.” Mugabe added that “ZAPU had refused to surrender these arms to the national armory. Instead they had cached the arms, some on farms the party had acquired for this purpose.” Mugabe said, “We felt we had been cheated by ZAPU.”⁸⁰

Later in the meeting, Keeley suggested to Mugabe that the allegations of torture of detained white Air Force officers, as reported by the *Christian Science Monitor* newspaper in the United States, could lead to the United States tying their sizeable foreign aid package for Zimbabwe to human rights. CIA director William Casey, true to form, was less concerned about human rights, and told Mugabe he was only concerned with these issues to the extent that they caused some Republican senators to challenge Zimbabwe’s aid levels. Responding to Mugabe’s claim that the Western media was making up these stories of atrocities, “Mr. Casey said the aid linkage was not paramount, but stressed that Zimbabwe had what was essentially a public relations problem and they had to understand that we [the United States] don’t control what appears in our press.”⁸¹ Keeley noted how, at the end of the meeting, Casey presented to Mugabe a leather-bound copy of the book Casey had written on the American revolution, “noting that our countries shared the experience of having had to fight to achieve this goal.”⁸²

British Concerns prior to *Gukurahundi*

In late September 1982, the British were also expressing concern over potential problems if the ZNA was used to settle scores with ZAPU, given that the British had invested heavily into the BMATT program. The British defence secretary, John Nott, wrote a summary for Thatcher of his one-day trip to Zimbabwe where he met with Mugabe. He said that the Zimbabweans wanted BMATT to focus on training instructors, rather than continuing the role as advisors at the unit level. Nott wrote that this would reduce British “influence with the units themselves” but enable them to “avoid the danger of association with the growing Army thuggery in Matabeleland in particular.” Nott was in favor of reducing British contact at the unit level as it would

⁸⁰ Ibid. ⁸¹ Ibid. ⁸² Ibid.

“make it easier to reduce its [BMATT’s] size next year, *and distance us from the nastier side of African behaviour.*” The latter comment is an interesting expression of race state thinking about military discipline in Zimbabwe, and Nott’s interest in limiting BMATT’s potential liability over future state crimes committed by ZNA soldiers trained and/or led by British soldiers.

Nott’s main concern at this point, however, was reports of the torture of white Air Force personnel who were in custody and awaiting trial after being charged with the sabotage of four Hunter fighter jets supplied by the British at the Thornhill base. Nott recommended to Mugabe that the public trials of the arrested Air Force members should be sped up and over soon. If not, given the allegations of torture used to obtain confessions, Britain may choose to withhold training and aid. In response, Mugabe “denied the allegations, and indicated that the officers would be brought to trial: but he also suggested that the British public should be more concerned about the sabotage than about torture.” Nott then threatened Mugabe: “we shall have to withhold assistance to the Air Force which the Zimbabweans have asked for.”⁸³ Nott concluded his notes on his meeting with Mugabe, stating, “I was left uneasy by my meeting with Mr. Mugabe.” He framed his unease in a way similar to that of other diplomats at the time, writing how Mugabe “either did not know what was going on in his army and on the security front, or that he knew things were not right, but was not disposed or able to do anything about it.” This would be the way many diplomats would report on the next period of more intensive state violence against civilians. For Nott, he also noted the consequences of this in a usual racialized trope: “The drift in Zimbabwe towards increasingly unpleasant and extra-constitutional methods must have consequences both for the confidence of white Zimbabweans and for the prospects for Western investment.”⁸⁴ The British, like the Americans and many other Western diplomats who would be involved in Zimbabwe during the *Gukurahundi* period (1983–87) were mostly concerned to keep their criticisms safely below a level that could

⁸³ Nott does not give the exact date of his meeting with Mugabe. He traveled to five countries between September 10 and 26, and Zimbabwe appears to have been the last place he visited. “Secretary of Defense to Prime Minister,” MO 25/2/23/2, October 6, 1982, 821006, Nott to MT, PREM 19/690, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, f. 14. Italics added by author.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

possibly push Mugabe toward the Soviet Union. At the same time, most diplomats relied on the reports and sentiments of white Zimbabweans about their own safety and future in Zimbabwe as the key variables to assess what actions Britain should take to try and influence the actions of their supposed “close allies” in ZANU.

Through 1982, Mugabe continued to push back against any criticisms of his government’s handling of human rights. Mugabe even made a point of complaining to CIA director William Casey and US ambassador Keeley about Nott’s threat to withhold Zimbabwe aid and the BMATT program over human rights issues (e.g., the treatment of the detained Air Force pilots). “Mugabe mentioned that British Defense Secretary Nott had raised the same matter with him last Saturday and had made the same point, that this could jeopardize the British aid program, including BMATT.” Keeley wrote that “Mugabe expressed resentment that we [the United States] and the British would tie our aid to such matters and would in effect threaten to cut off aid. That was not the basis on which the Zimbabwe government could accept aid from its friends, he said.”⁸⁵ This quote from Mugabe captures the attitude Mugabe would take in different diplomatic forums. It was consistent with his messaging to the British and Americans from the meetings at Geneva in 1976 to his meetings with them as prime minister. He was always confident that he should be treated as an equal in a negotiation and not pander to wealthier, more militarily powerful, nations, particularly the British. He genuinely seemed to appreciate the respect he earned from Thatcher and Reagan in these early years, but their respect for him was tied to his delivering what they wanted from a pro-Western African state in southern Africa. Governor Soames had written to Cyrus Vance in March of 1980 warning of the potential break between Mugabe and the West, and the rise of more radical leadership in his place. Soames wrote:

If Zimbabwe does not get sufficient western encouragement and assistance over the next two years, he [Mugabe] could be driven to policies which would lead to a rapid white exodus (so far avoided) on a scale which could lead

⁸⁵ Secretary of State, 1982. “William Casey’s meeting with Prime Minister Mugabe: Namibia, Zimbabwe-South Africa Relations, Internal Situations, CSM Article on Civil Rights,” From Secretary of State WashDC to US mission USUN, New York, October 2, Unclassified, US Department of State, Case No. F-20212-29009, Doc No. C0525610 Date 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y9gcpdbe>.

quickly towards the kind of economic problems which have plagued Mozambique; and there could then be a tendency to head towards an early confrontation with South Africa.

According to Soames, the way to avoid this threat was to facilitate “a stable and prosperous Zimbabwe.”⁸⁶ As the next chapter shows, this balance was to be threatened in 1983 and 1984, but even as evidence pointed toward extreme state crimes against civilians, western diplomats and foreign policy bureaucrats would continue to assess the situation through the lens of race states and Cold War interests.

⁸⁶ Fm Salisbury to FCO, “For Secretary of State from Governor: Personal Letter to Cy Vance,” March 23, 1980, item 56, FCO36/2751, BNA.