

The Military Factor in Zimbabwe's Political and Electoral Affairs

“Our demand is just and legitimate. We demand a free and fair election where international observers will oversee.” (1978), Josiah Tongogara, Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) Commander.

Preface

By Dr. Martin Rupiya

In Zimbabwe's dynamic political and electoral affairs since 2000, it is difficult to see the wood for the trees as it relates to the role of the military? And yet, we must remain clear, the use of violence--manifest through the role of the military in politics -- is but a reflection of the dominance of an aggressive faction within ZANU (PF), one that has always had the propensity to kill, maim and torture political opponents and is now able to do so using armed state organs. As we write, this faction is galvanized to extremes, shorn of all semblance of political rationality, spurred by the obvious failing health of the First Secretary and President against the background of fiercely contested, internal, political succession issue within the party.

The excellent research undertaken here, carefully documenting incidents and personalities associated with the violence strategy within a post-colonial Zimbabwe has to be located within the broader political survival struggle of a former liberation movement that has now lost electoral mass appeal. There are at least two historical epochs, over the last 30 years, during which evidence of the aggressive faction's willingness to destroy political opponents had registered itself, only to be quickly reigned in. The first period was against the Ndebele, as well as designed to destroy ZAPU the political party and former ZIPRA forces. This period, from the early 1980s until 1988, witnessed separate armed and partisan elements created and used outside the emerging and integrating conventional Zimbabwe National Army.¹ Later acknowledged by President Robert Mugabe as "moment of madness" the period witnessed the deployment of a highly partisan Zimbabwe People's Militia (ZPM), the Korean trained 5th Brigade and the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) all with a command and control chain that was separate from the conventional force.

The second period for the dominant aggressive faction to show its fangs was in 2000. This followed the then Army Spokesperson, Major Chancellor Diye who, before the tight Parliamentary Elections of June 2000, announced that the Military was apolitical and would support any victor emerging from the electoral context. This was the last time this type of message was to be heard.

On 9th January 2002, led by the late Chief of Defence Staff Lieutenant General Vitalis Zvinavashe, the service chiefs pledged exclusive allegiance to President R. Mugabe and ZANU-PF. The barely defeated ZANU-PF, only returned to office with a wafer thin 5 seat majority, publicly declared the establishment of a War Cabinet, peopled by "Amadoda Sibili" and whose war mongering objectives were to be implemented by a security sector with a defined role and of course, after the necessary "purification" with the political opposition now transmuted to represent "the face of the enemy."

This development has remained true to this day: where the partisan military is discharging a political role, holding the ring "bludgeoning any perceived or actual political opponents and

¹ See *Breaking the Silence Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland & Midlands 1980-1989*, compiled by the Catholic Commission for Justice & Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation, September 2001.

thereby denying any political aspirants through the elections, the opportunity. Meanwhile, ZANU (PF) continues to desperately re-organize itself to wrest political power and legitimacy. For example, in 2005, *Operation Murambatsvina* uprooted an estimated 700 000 families or 2.4 million people, a further flitting moment, showing us the propensity for callousness of this mendacious group.² Again further and similar events were quickly culled from the cacophony of local and international criticism that emerged.

The major electoral and political beneficiary from the critical constituencies of rural folk, the unemployed, struggling workers, students, intellectuals and urban communities is the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) whose manifesto promises non-violence, tolerance and consultation in adopting people-centred policies—something that resulted in sweeping victories at local government, national assembly and even presidential vote in March 2008.

By 2008, after the unprecedented socio-economic collapse that further saw the deployment of the military in the strategic areas of the economy, the opportunity for divesting the politics away from the militarization appeared remote. Significantly, as this research demonstrates, the Electoral Commission and associated stages such as delimitation; voter registration, voter education, campaigning, manning the command centre and electoral results announcements were all facets in the hands of the military, whose purpose and objectives are driven by one of the contestants: ZANU-PF.

Bereft of any political legitimacy and forced to go into negotiations that resulted in the Global Political Agreement (GPA) signed in September 2008, ZANU-PF factions appeared to have been mollified by the rejection of the voters and the intervention of the SADC and the AU, forcing the party to make concessions and accept a Transitional arrangement within a coalition government with the MDC formations. Two years into the coalition government, even after admitting major areas of security sector reform as captured in the GPA, the internal dynamics of diminishing day-to-day influence, president Mugabe's poor health and slipping grip on power of the political party under SADC facilitation, the aggressive faction appears now convinced the time has come to wreck the coalition agreement and impose itself on the citizenry of Zimbabwe through the so-called elections where the winner has already been declared.

However, what this preface has sought to argue: is that, we need to see the wood for the trees—the military is but a pawn of a political faction—imbued with aggression and with a history of seeking to destroy political opponents, even within ZANU-PF. Hence, the current events do not reflect a universal position within ZANU-PF. Other moderates quite rightly see the folly of this option but remain frozen as the First Secretary and President of the Party remains wedded to the tool of violence and abuse of opponents in an environment characterized by an absence of the rule of law, unreformed Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information & Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the security sector enjoying impunity for any human rights excesses. Furthermore, the option of visiting

² See *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to assess the Scope & Impact of Operation Murambatsvina* by UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements in Zimbabwe, Mrs Anna Kajumulo Tibajuka, 18 July 2005, at ww2.unhabitat.org/documents/ZimbabweReport.pdf; see also *Operation Murambatsvina – An Overview & Summary* by *Sokwanele* at <http://www.sokwanele.com>, accessed 02 June 2011.

violence on citizens appears at variance with the global values and especially the North African norm that has witnessed a rapid rapprochement between the military and citizens in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya.

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1. Summary

Since Zimbabwe's attainment of independence from colonial rule in 1980, the security sector, particularly the military, has played a significant role in the political and electoral affairs of the country. The visibility and influence of the military rose gradually over the years to the current position of dominance and de facto veto power over Zimbabwe's civilian affairs.

From the 1985 national elections where the military featured prominently in the violence against Zimbabwe African People's Party (ZAPU) supporters, Zimbabwe's electoral processes have been militarized and subject to interference by a military partisan towards the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). It is this toxic role of the security sector in the electoral environment and the administration of elections that must be addressed urgently if Zimbabwe is to create an environment conducive to holding credible, free and fair elections that are without violence or intimidation.

Zimbabwe's political transition has been dogged by the partisan role of the military and other security services. This report provides empirical evidence of the omnipresent, partisan and politicized nature of the military in the socio-political governance of the country and how this toxic role is blocking Zimbabwe's democratic political transition. The use of the military to unleash terror in the electorate is Clausewitzian – it is aimed to deliver the political objective of keeping ZANU-PF in power and therefore the violence strategy is not random, it has a specific purpose. This report presents blatant political and partisan statements made by senior military officials to prove their compromised standing and their unholy alliance with ZANU-PF in blocking the country's democratic transition.

Over the years, in line with an elaborate patronage system, the previous ZANU-PF government controlled by president Mugabe systematically deployed military personnel to strategic positions in various state institutions responsible for governance such as the judiciary, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the Delimitation Commission, local government institutions, and state-controlled companies such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM). As a result, the military is deeply entrenched in the economy making their economic interests just as powerful as their fears for accountability for human right abuses.

It is unacceptable in a democracy to politicize the military, as it is to militarize political and civilian affairs and institutions. While the political leadership of the military is overtly partisan towards ZANU-PF, many soldiers in the rank and file are professional and non-partisan, aspiring to faithfully serve their country. It is a classical proverbial case of a fish with a rotting head. This report established that major challenges of partisanship and political interference are with the military leadership and not with the bulk of the low ranking members.

The Military Factor in Zimbabwe's Political and Electoral Affairs report gives recommendations on how the security sector, especially the military, can be subjected to civilian control and oversight to prevent it from subverting the will of the voters in the next elections. This report examines the role of the army in political processes such as political party campaigns, involvement of soldiers in politically-motivated violence and their extremely partisan and entrenched role in the administration of the economic affairs of the State.

At a minimum, the security sector - comprising the military, the police, the prison services and the central intelligence agency - must disentangle and completely separate itself from partisan politics and interference in the country's political and electoral affairs. Utterances by the military leadership that they will not salute any one without liberation credentials, which amount to pre-emptive coups in support of ZANU-PF, such as those made in 2002, 2008 and 2011, do not augur well for democracy and must cease to enable ordinary Zimbabweans to vote freely and have their vote count.

If Zimbabwe is to genuinely prepare for fresh elections that are free and fair, and where violence or intimidation play no part, then reform and transformation of the military and other security sector branches is of paramount importance. The power-sharing government of Zimbabwe and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) must urgently engage the military with a view to restore professionalism, independence and non-partisanship to the military and to completely divorce the military from all political interference.

2. Research Methodology

This report is based on Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition research conducted between September 2010 and March 2011. The research included interviews with various policy makers, serving and retired members of the military establishment, and officials in the inclusive government, security sector experts, civil society officials and ordinary Zimbabweans. Desktop research was used to gather data.

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition also reviewed various reports on the military by both local and international civil society organizations, including Zimbabwe Peace Project, Zimbabwe Election Support Network, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, media reports and other material on the subject of military involvement in political and electoral affairs.

Names of key informants consulted in the compilation of this report have been withheld for security reasons.

Dr. Martin Rupiya, a security sector expert and former senior military officer in the Zimbabwe National Army, externally reviewed this report.