

THE MAKING OF AN AFRICAN ARMY: THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE, 1980-87.

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The development of Zimbabwe's post-independence army provides an interesting case of how a victorious African revolutionary movement has succeeded in balancing ethnic political domination with a significant level of military professionalism. On independence in April 1980, the new state of Zimbabwe inherited three rival armies after a seven year civil war. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party led by Robert Mugabe came to power controlling the strongest political army but the weakest military force.¹ It had virtually no experience of conventional military organisation. Seven years later, the Mugabe Government had created a single Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) which was undergoing one of the most advanced forms of command and staff training in Black Africa. The ZNA was also operating an external task force and had emerged as the dominant military instrument of the Front Line States' diplomatic coalition. In short, the progress of the Zimbabwean Army seemed indicative of the ZANU administration's ability to reconcile the often competing needs of ethnic politicisation with conventional military capability and, reflected its degree of success as an incumbent regime.

To illustrate the process by which insurgent guerrilla fighters were transformed into incumbent conventional soldiers, four major phases in the ZNA's development are examined. Firstly, the military policy of the ZANU Government is explained in the context of its attempt to reconcile contending military traditions through a process of army integration. Secondly, the radically different training roles of Britain and North Korea are discussed. Thirdly,

the influence of South African destabilisation strategy on the evolution of Zimbabwean military doctrine is assessed. Finally, the ZNA's operational performance - both internally in Matabeleland and externally in Mozambique - is briefly considered to illustrate the capabilities and limitations of the army as an instrument of state policy.

THE POST-INDEPENDENCE SETTING: THE MILITARY LEGACY OF THE CIVIL WAR

The Rhodesian-Zimbabwean bush war ended in a military stalemate. The ZANU Government came to office following a Commonwealth controlled ceasefire and a British supervised election. As Mugabe put it: 'We did not win a military victory..We reached a political settlement..a compromise.'² The new administration faced the complex, even unique problem of amalgamating three mutually antagonistic armies. Each army was intact and undefeated in the field; each was different in ethnic composition; and each possessed a distinctive military tradition.

THE RHODESIAN ARMY

After independence the regular white infantry and special force units which had served the defunct Smith and Muzorewa regimes were quickly disbanded.³ But substantial forces remained operational. These included three white officered askari battalions of the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) as well as mounted infantry, armoured and artillery units. Black Rhodesian troops were largely recruited from the Karanga, a large Shona sub-group. They were highly trained in counter-insurgency and conventional warfare and many had undergone parachute and special force skills. In short, the Rhodesian Army remained a formidable military organisation whose regular structure duplicated that of the British Army.⁴

THE ZIMBABWE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY ARMY (ZIPRA)

ZIPRA was the military wing of Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). It was a 20,000 strong Ndebele-Kalanga army drawing support from some 20 per cent of the population located in Western Zimbabwe. Largely as a result of its geographical and demographic position, ZIPRA had developed as a mixed guerrilla-conventional force. Operating from Zambia during the 1970s thousands of ZIPRA recruits had been trained as conventional troops by mainly Soviet and East German instructors.⁵ The ZIPRA High Command led by Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa - the 'Black Russian' - adopted the so-called 'turning point strategy'. This envisaged a conventional invasion of Rhodesia from across the Zambezi. For this reason ZIPRA's military emphasis was not on guerrilla insurgency - although guerrillas did fight - but on developing a regular army infrastructure.⁶

THE ZIMBABWE AFRICAN NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ZANLA)

ZANLA was the military wing of the politically victorious ZANU party. It was a 35-40,000 strong Shona guerrilla army drawing support from some 80 per cent of the Zimbabwean population. Using Mozambique as a rear strategic base, ZANLA had executed a Chimurenga Chechipiri (liberation war) based around the tenets of Maoist revolutionary warfare. Accordingly the primary emphasis was not upon military action but on the political mobilisation of the peasantry based on strong party-army liaison.⁷ Demographic superiority, the use of political commissars and the ability to harness Shona cultural nationalism were the prime reasons for ZANU's election victory.⁸ ZANLA forces led by such figures as Josiah Tongogara, Rex Nhongo and Josiah Tungamirai and trained and equipped by such countries as China, Romania and Tanzania

waged a war of guerrilla attrition. In strategic terms the ZANLA campaign had advanced to the second stage of Maoist protracted warfare: the stage of revolutionary equalisation.⁹ Because of this guerrilla operational mode, ZANLA was in formal military terms weak. Unlike the Rhodesian Army and ZIPRA, ZANLA possessed no conventional military organisation or capability. It had not, and more importantly, could not vanquish its military rivals. In this sense ZANU was ill-prepared for the military responsibilities of incumbent government. This paradox of political supremacy but military inferiority haunted the ZANU regime. For five years the Mugabe Government sought to correct the imbalance through creating an incumbent military establishment which would be compatible with both ZANU's ethnic political domination and its insurgent ethos. To understand this process it is necessary to consider the revolutionary context of ZANU military tradition since this exercised enormous influence over defence policy in the post-independence era.

DEFENCE POLICY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY CONTEXT OF ZANU MILITARY TRADITION

After independence the ruling ZANU party's commitment to creating a single conventional army tended to be defined by the experience of revolutionary warfare. In this respect the army which finally emerged reflected a dual military character. It embraced both regular professionalism and guerrilla politicisation. In turn these elements were closely related to the political anatomy of the Mugabe regime. During the 1980s, the Zimbabwean Government appeared to assume what might be best described as 'outer' and 'inner' manifestations of power. The 'outer' manifestation of power was expressed through the inherited instruments of a Western modelled Parliament and Cabinet. These institutions gave

the Zimbabwean state the appearance of a Westminster political system. The 'inner' manifestation of power was expressed through the revolutionary organs of an Eastern modelled party Central Committee and Politburo. In a real sense, the levels of military professionalism achieved tend to conform with the Westminster 'outer' instruments and can be associated with British Army training. On the other hand, ethnic domination and the guerrilla ethos in the ZNA are expressed through the Eastern 'inner' organs and can be associated with the praetorian training of the North Korean Army.¹⁰ Zimbabwe is not a Marxist state but nonetheless, Marxist revolutionary methodology has been in evidence in the realm of defence policy since independence. Several important features derived from the revolutionary military experience of the 1970s have been influential throughout the 1980s. One of these is the formulation of what is called 'the ZANU Idea'. This is an Africanised version of revolutionary war in which Shona cultural nationalism and the legacy of Chimurenga Chokutanga (the first war of liberation 1896-97) have been merged with the organisational modes of 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought'.¹¹ According to the 'ZANU Idea' the guerrilla struggle was a people's storm, a Gukurahundi in which 'ZANU has become the Zimbabwean people and the Zimbabwean people have become ZANU'.¹² This was to become the slogan of the Zimbabwean Army's North Korean trained units.

Another important influence on military policy during the 1980s was the use of the Dare re Chimurenga (ZANU War Council) system developed in the 1970s. The essence of the Dare system was to ensure Shona politico-military unity through the arbitration of factional strife. Mastery of arbitration methods contributed to Mugabe's rise as ZANU leader during the guerrilla war. In the

1980s, Dare techniques - involving the use of patronage, co-optation, compromise, pre-emption and elimination - of allies and enemies alike, were successfully transferred by ZANU to manage the military problems of incumbency. These features of the 'ZANU Idea' and the Dare system were the products of an African revolutionary war tradition which was in many respects diametrically opposed to the principles of military professionalism. It is in this context that the development of the ZNA must be seen.

THE PROCESS OF MILITARY INTEGRATION, 1980-81

The amalgamation of the three rival armies into a single national army took eighteen months and cost Z\$378.1 million about 25 per cent of the Zimbabwean budget. There were three decisive phases in the formation of the new ZNA. These were the creation of the Joint High Command; the introduction of the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT); and the Matabeleland military mutiny of early 1981. By the end of the integration programme in October 1981, the ZANU Government's military position had improved significantly and the ethnic politicisation of the new national army had commenced.

The Joint High Command (JHC)

On independence, Mugabe's main concern was to try to camouflage ZANU's military weakness. His strategy was to co-opt his stronger military rivals into the process of government and integration. It was a classic Dare technique. It explains why he created a JHC containing representatives of all three armies and why he invited Lieutenant-General Peter Walls, the Rhodesian commander, to oversee the merger operation. The co-option of Walls served to defuse any potential white coup attempt. Politically however this move was unacceptable in the long-term, since it made the integration

programme dependent upon the white Rhodesian professional officer corps.¹³ In retrospect, the Walls appointment is perhaps best understood as a move which bought time for the Mugabe administration to negotiate external military assistance from Britain.¹⁴ Similarly, any immediate ZIPRA threat was pre-empted by making Joshua Nkomo the new Minister of Home Affairs. This gave Nkomo control of the powerful para-military police force as well as special access to defence matters through his senior ZIPRA officers on the JHC.¹⁵ In theory the JHC was supposed to provide the machinery for amalgamation; in practice it led to stalemate. There was total disagreement over the force structure for a single national army. In June 1980, the first attempt by Rhodesian officers to integrate ZANLA-ZIPRA forces ended in a ZANLA mutiny which was promptly quelled by Rhodesian askari.¹⁶ Subsequently, Walls and many of his officers resigned. But by this time an Anglo-Zimbabwean agreement had been reached and the British Army had replaced the Rhodesian predominance over the merger process.

The Introduction of BMATT

By July 1980, a BMATT of 150 instructors was in Zimbabwe. Why did the ZANU Government request British military aid? The answer seems to lie in the strictly neutral attitude adopted by the British commanded and dominated Commonwealth Monitoring Force which had supervised the ceasefire in 1979-80. Another factor was the warm personal relationship which Mugabe developed with Lord Soames, the last Governor of Southern Rhodesia, during the same period.¹⁷ In short ZANU-ZANLA trusted the British to be impartial in military matters. BMATT managed its policy towards integration on the basis of operating as an independent catalyst. Lacking a historical blueprint to work from the British launched a gigantic crash course

to create a rudimentary conventional military structure into which thousands of guerrillas could be moved from bush holding camps.¹⁸ By this method, 45 integrated battalions, or 65,000 personnel were formed into a new ZNA by October 1981. This progress was remarkable since it was seriously challenged by military factionalism and by mutiny.¹⁹

Factionalism and the Matabeleland Mutiny of 1981

Army integration was accompanied by simmering ZANLA-ZIPRA rivalry which threatened for a time to plunge Zimbabwe into a civil war. Rex Nhongo, the ZANLA commander was convinced that Lookout Masuku, the ZIPRA commander was trying to kill him.²⁰ ZIPRA commanders were bitterly resentful towards a ZANU Government special directive issued in November 1980, which ordered that all field officer commissions be awarded on the basis of parity rather than merit. This decision was made after British Army assessments on merit resulted in the first nine integrated battalions emerging with Ndebele commanding officers.²¹ This development was, yet again, an embarrassing reminder to ZANU of the lack of conventional military talent in ZANLA. But worse was to follow. In February 1981, ZIPRA conventional armoured units stationed in Matabeleland mutinied and attempted to converge on the city of Bulawayo. It was a direct challenge to the Mugabe regime. Faced with open rebellion, Mugabe was forced to rely upon Rhodesian air and ground units to crush the rebels. He was also forced to enlist the support of the ZAPU-ZIPRA leadership to prevent the mutiny from expanding into a potential civil war situation.²² He was well served by both parties and the failure of the 1981 ZIPRA mutiny had several important consequences which marked a turning point in ZANU's military fortunes. Firstly, integration survived the Matabeleland crisis

demonstrating that the formation of the ZNA was a durable process. Secondly, ZIPRA's conventional capacity was destroyed during the confrontation and thousands of ZIPRA soldiers were either disarmed, or believing they had been betrayed by their leaders cached their weapons in secret. This fissure between the ZAPU-ZIPRA leadership and many of the rank and file was to the benefit of an insecure and suspicious ZANU Government.²³ Thirdly, the ZANU administration was persuaded that it required a special conventional force loyal to the ruling party to end its reliance upon former Rhodesian units--despite the latter's proven loyalty. This was the origin of North Korean involvement in Zimbabwean military training. Fourthly, integration was accelerated even further. From April to September 1981, BMATT produced three infantry battalions per month - one Zimbabwean soldier every fifteen minutes.²⁴ Fifthly, in the wake of the abortive ZIPRA mutinies, ZANU announced the formation of a ZNA higher command echelon determined by ethnic political considerations and ZANLA dominance. Ethnic parity was for instance, only conceded at the apex of the ZNA high command. Nhongo became Commander of the Army with Masuku as Deputy Commander. Both men became Lieutenant-generals. Josiah Tungamirai (ex-ZANLA) and Jevan Maseko (ex-ZIPRA) became Chiefs of Staff with the rank of major-general. But the majority of the brigadiers and colonels were ex-ZANLA Shona guerrillas. In addition nearly all of the operational commands were held by ZANU-ZANLA loyalists.²⁵ Furthermore, a second army directive was issued by Mugabe. This created two types of commissioned officers for the ZNA: political commissioned officers from colonel and above and field commissioned officers up to the rank of lieutenant-colonel with the latter determined by professional merit.²⁶ The effect of this cleavage was

twofold. Firstly, it concentrated control of the national army in the hands of mainly former ZANLA Shona officers. Secondly, it shielded the politically commissioned senior echelon from undergoing professional staff training. They were required only to 'attend' an intermediate staff course. Some did, but others including General Nhongo went to Pakistan for private training courses. This cleavage was later to cause the ZNA serious operational command and control problems especially in Mozambique. ZANU's growing ethnic domination of the army also permitted it to strike at its former ZIPRA rivals. In February 1982, the 'discovery' of arms caches throughout Matabeleland, was used to decapitate the the ZAPU-ZIPRA leadership in the government and the army. Accused of plotting a coup, Nkomo and several co-opted ZAPU ministers were dismissed from office while Masuku, Dabengwa and six members of the former ZIPRA High Command were arrested and tried for treason. Although they were acquitted, they remained in detention where Masuku later died with Dabengwa being finally released in late 1986.²⁷ In August 1985, several more former senior ZIPRA commanders serving in the ZNA, were detained on similar charges.²⁸ These minor purges gave ZANU-ZANLA undisputed mastery over the national army. It was a case of 'MuZANU Chete' (ZANU only). This is not to suggest that there were no senior Ndebele officers left. There were several, but Ndebele advancement in the ZNA came to be determined by the degree of distance between an officer and the ZAPU party. Many senior Ndebele ex-ZIPRA officers were posted to training and service branches as opposed to operational appointments, although again, there were exceptions.²⁹ The cost of ZANU supremacy in the army was a high one. Throughout 1982, nearly 4,000 Ndebele soldiers deserted from the ZNA and began

a five year insurgent and dissident campaign in Matabeleland.³⁰ By 1985 then, ZANU-ZANLA the weakest military force in 1980 had successfully imposed its political authority over the ZNA. It was also reversing its conventional weakness. British instructors were producing large numbers of ex-ZANLA Shona guerrillas as well-trained regular soldiers. In addition the North Koreans were providing ZANU with praetorian guard units.

THE BRITISH TRAINING ROLE IN THE POST-INTEGRATION ERA

During the 1980s, Britain was principally responsible for the professional development of the ZNA. BMATT teams provided the conventional infrastructure required by a modern African army. Great emphasis was placed upon making the ZNA self-sufficient in instructional staff, on officer training and advising on the organisation of the Military Academy and the Staff College. The British helped fix the ZNA's strength at 42,000 in 1982. They also helped establish the army order of battle around five infantry brigades supported by armour and artillery units.³¹ The conversion of the ever reliable RAR into a commando regiment, the creation of a parachute group and the raising of a Zimbabwean Special Air Service (SAS) squadron all owed much to the British Army.³² In 1986, the ZNA underwent a quantum leap in professionalism when a nine month Command and Staff Course was introduced at the Zimbabwe Staff College. In part, this course was a response to the ZNA's involvement in Mozambique and the problems associated with extended military operations. The Command and Staff course is also based on the British Army Staff College and as such is the equivalent of any such college in the world, and is probably unequalled in Southern Africa.³³ To have achieved this standard of professional development after only seven years was testimony to the progress

made by the ZNA. Publicly, BMATT Commanders spoke of exceptional even 'miraculous' results in military advancement since 1980.³⁴ Privately however, there were more cautious sentiments expressed. The British faced considerable difficulties in seeking to professionalise the ZNA. These difficulties included European ethnocentrism; occasional anti-Western feeling from some senior ZNA officers; British frustration with a ZNA High Command which was seen as clinging to the ZANLA revolutionary war tradition and impeding good operational practices. Some British officers were convinced that the professional African officer corps they were shaping in the 1980s was nothing less than the seed-bed for a coup in the 1990s which would sweep away Mugabe as Nkrumah had been swept away in the 1960s. Others believed that because of higher command deficiencies the ZNA would remain a 'super askari' force.³⁵ But these criticisms notwithstanding, the overall view of the ZNA was still one of guarded optimism with much faith placed in the Staff College.

THE TRAINING ROLE OF THE NORTH KOREAN ARMY IN ZIMBABWE

The British were associated with ZNA professionalism. Their presence conformed with Zimbabwe's 'outer' Westminster instruments of Parliament and Cabinet. In contrast, the North Koreans were responsible for training praetorian units linked to the 'inner' organs of Central Committee and Politburo. Why did the Zimbabwean Government accept North Korean military aid? There appear to be several reasons. Firstly, Mugabe clearly shared President Kim Il Sung's interest in the Non-Aligned Movement and seems to have admired Kim's idiosyncratic promotion of revolution in Africa.³⁶ Secondly, and related to the above, was Mugabe's apparent fascination with Kim's Juche (self-reliance) and Chajusong (national independence and anti-imperialism) ideology.³⁷ Mugabe's first overseas visit as Prime Minister of Zimbabwe was to North Korea

in October 1980. On this visit to Pyongyang, a treaty of mutual friendship was signed between Zimbabwe and North Korea which appears to have involved a Z\$12 million military aid package.³⁸ Thirdly, what probably converted these political relations into actual military assistance were the events of early 1981. The ZANU Government's reliance on former Rhodesian units to quell the ZIPRA mutiny in Matabeleland was undoubtedly profoundly disturbing to many in the ruling party. Redressing military inferiority by forming a special conventional force rapidly trained by the North Koreans was perhaps a strong attraction. In any event, special ZANLA guerrilla cadres were kept outside of the formation of the ZNA during the first half of 1981.³⁹

In August 1981, a 106 strong North Korean military team under Major-General Sim Hyon Dok arrived in Zimbabwe.⁴⁰ The North Korean Army or In Min Gun (People's Army) was at that time the seventh largest army in the world and it was directly controlled by Kim Il Sung's Central Committee and Politburo. It represented one of the most regimented of all contemporary societies and it had a distinctive military tradition. The North Korean Army brought several concepts which were adopted by Zimbabwean military units. One of these was the idea of the Chosan Kyongbidae (Special Security Corps) which became the model for both the Fifth Brigade and the Presidential Guard Regiment which the North Koreans trained and partially equipped.⁴¹ Both of these units were praetorian in nature. They owed their allegiance to the ZANU party. The Fifth Brigade was for instance, directly linked to the 'ZANU Idea' and was christened Gukurahundi (or the People's Storm Brigade). It carried a party flag and its slogan was 'We support the Prime Minister Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe which means support for the whole population'.⁴²

The Fifth Brigade numbered some 5,000, was armour supported and was commanded by the ZANLA veteran Colonel Perence 'Black Jesus' Shiri. Both the Fifth and the 3,000 strong Presidential Guard were incorporated into the ZNA order of battle following nine months of North Korean training. The latter was inflexible and obsolete since it was wedded to Soviet tactical doctrine developed during the early 1950s.⁴³ When the Fifth Brigade was deployed in Matabeleland in 1983-84, it proved murderous and eventually it was withdrawn.⁴⁴ Some elements were retrained by the British. Other elements became party security intelligence officers within the ZNA; some went into the air force and still others retained their links with the North Koreans in the much more successful Zimbabwe People's Militia (ZPM). The ZPM was based upon the North Korean theory of the Nodong Chokwidae (Workers and Peasants Red Militia) and copied its kun (provincial), ri (district) and tong (village) system. The Militia embodied the 'ZANU Idea' and developed a personality cult around Mugabe which owed more than a passing similarity to that surrounding Kim Il Sung 'the Great Leader'.⁴⁵ The ZPM central training centre was named after Mugabe. The first ZPM brigade was called the Gabriel People's Militia Model Brigade.⁴⁶ There was even an attempt to render into Shona the 'Song of Kim Il Sung' with transposed names:

Tell blizzards thar rage on the wild Manchurian plains,
 Tell, you nights in forests deep where the silence reigns,
 Who is the partisan whose deeds are unsurpassed?
 Who is the patriot whose fame shall ever last?
 So dear to all our hearts is our general's glorious name,
 Our own beloved Kim Il Sung, of undying fame. 47

By early 1985, the ZPM was 20,000 strong and had been absorbed into ZNA Headquarters as an auxiliary wing of the army and the ruling party. Several militia units were also deployed into Mozambique.⁴⁸ The North Korean military influence on the ZNA was mixed. Their training of the Fifth Brigade was poor and notable for its emphasis

upon indiscriminate aggression. There was however, more success with the less operational Presidential Guard and the highly politicised People's Militia - which in many respects can be seen as a reserve army closely linked to the ZANU party rural machine but co-ordinated from ZNA Headquarters. The appointment in 1984 of the armed services commanders to the ZANU Politburo was also consistent with North Korean practice - although it must also be remembered that Dare tradition may also have influenced this decision. Finally, there is some evidence of North Korean involvement in ZANU party intelligence training. By 1986, most North Korean military advisers had departed amidst suggestions that they had become unpopular in Zimbabwean military circles for social and cultural reasons.⁴⁹

SOUTH AFRICAN DESTABILISATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ZIMBABWEAN MILITARY DOCTRINE

Throughout most of the 1980s Zimbabwe suffered from selective rather than from wholesale South African destabilisation activities. This was due to the ambiguous relationship which existed between Harare and Pretoria. At one level Zimbabwe maintained intelligence and economic relations with South Africa. But politically, Zimbabwe was at the cutting edge of the ideological cold war being waged against Pretoria.⁵⁰ In practice, what this relationship meant in defence terms was that Zimbabwe had more of a posture than a policy regarding destabilisation. For instance, in all Staff College instruction the enemy was never referred to as being South Africa. He was only known by the acronym of 'Antizim'. Nor was military doctrine immune from common Zimbabwean perceptions about South Africa. These perceptions were largely shaped by rather crude government propaganda and even cruder

analytical work by many Zimbabwean academics and journalists.⁵¹ In the ZNA, perceptions ran from what might be called the 'silver bullet' theory - which postulated an imminent victory for the forces of liberation based on guerrilla warfare and sanctions - -to a pessimistic conviction that the South African Defence Force (SADF) was invincible. The result was a dangerous cocktail of bellicosity and paranoia throughout military circles. The problems in developing objective threat-assessment in this unstable atmosphere were considerable. The strategic reality for Zimbabwe by 1986 was quite simple; growing political and military isolation in a region undergoing neutralisation and devastation at the hands of South Africa.⁵² Zimbabwe's external military commitment to Mozambique and internal insurgency in Matabeleland called for the formulation of military doctrine based on a clearly articulated defence policy. Instead crisis-management prevailed. For example, no attempt was made to create a Joint Planning Staff (JPS) to weld operational thinking together. Insufficient numbers of army officers were posted to Defence Force Headquarters (DFHQ) to work with civilian policy-makers in the Ministry of Defence. This resulted in inadequate co-ordination. All of these problems were related to the Zimbabwean Government's apparent determination to centralise military control in the hands of the politically commissioned and hence reliable ex-ZANLA High Command.⁵³

In short the ZNA muddled through. There was a positive side. BMATT provided sound technical tuition on the SADF down in some cases to unit level. An Anglo-Zimbabwean military planning cell provided tactical scenarios for responding to multiple 'Antizim' threats ranging from airborne incursions to limited invasion.⁵⁴ The study of South Africa's Total Strategy doctrine was introduced to military

intelligence personnel. The works of leading South African and international scholars were also obtained to provide officers with a multi-dimensional view of South Africa as a complex and deeply divided society incapable of resolving its internal crisis by military force.⁵⁵ To sum up, military doctrine was as well developed as could be expected in an army without a defined defence policy.

THE OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF THE ZNA

Since 1982, the ZNA has been deployed operationally in Matabeleland and in Mozambique. In both theatres the mode of warfare has been counter-insurgency.

Matabeleland

In Matabeleland it is clear from the pattern of army deployment between 1982-87, that the ZANU Government hoped to destroy ZAPU's infrastructure as well as eliminate Ndebele insurgents. One of the motives for attacking the ZAPU infrastructure appears to have been related to ZANU's drive to try and create the conditions for installing an eventual one party state.⁵⁶ The use of terror and the depredations of the Fifth Brigade have been documented elsewhere.⁵⁷ It is perhaps important to emphasise that like all internal security problems, the Matabeleland problem was not amenable to a purely military solution. It took five years for that lesson to be learned in Harare. Matabeleland remained staunchly loyal to ZAPU. The ZNA faced three types of dissidents in the region. Firstly, there was a small minority of so called 'Super ZAPU' insurgents who received some degree of South African aid. This group was magnified by ZANU in its campaign to discredit ZAPU.⁵⁸ By far the most numerous of the dissident forces were ex-ZIPRA guerrillas who represented the second type of insurgents. Thirdly,

there was the pure bandit element. The ZNA contained the insurgency in Matabeleland but it never dominated it. Eventually, a political agreement between ZANU and ZAPU and an amnesty was reached in late 1987 which restored peace to the province.⁵⁹

Mozambique

After 1982, Zimbabwe's commitment to protect its transport routes to the sea through Mozambique involved the ZNA in FRELIMO's (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) war against RENAMO (Mozambique National Resistance Movement). Because Zimbabwe had signed a 1981 mutual defence treaty with Mozambique there was always a fear in some ZNA circles that Zimbabwe would be sucked into an open ended and unwinnable conflict.⁶⁰ Between 1982-85, ZNA forces increased from 1,000 to the insertion of a 7,000 strong Special Task Force (STF). Two railway corridors were created by the STF: the Beira Corridor and the Limpopo Corridor. Although the ZNA role was mainly confined to defensive patrolling, Zimbabwean special forces did launch large-scale search and destroy operations against RENAMO in Northern and Central Mozambique.⁶¹ Financial restraints, the insistence on trying to control operations from Harare rather than through a forward field headquarters and logistical problems combined to keep the ZNA role limited. The STF commitment was always unpopular amongst many of the troops who often complained of being hatichada kunyegrera (literally 'fed up'). The spill over of RENAMO activities into Eastern Zimbabwe and border refugee problems exacerbated ZNA problems operationally.⁶² Nevertheless, on balance, the ZNA fulfilled an important policy priority for Zimbabwe and other Front Line States by keeping the corridors open: namely defying South Africa's transport hegemony through the deployment of military forces.⁶³ It was a considerable

achievement which helped in the December 1990 Rome Agreement ostensibly aimed at ending the Mozambique crisis.⁶⁴

ZIMBABWE: WHAT KIND OF ARMY?

Armies reflect the socio-political systems from which they spring. In this respect I have argued that the ZNA's dualistic military character mirrors an equally dualistic political system with both 'outer' and 'inner' manifestations of institutional power. As Zimbabwe has embraced both Westminster instruments and ethnic revolutionary organs, so the army has adopted both regular professionalism and guerrilla modes of politicisation. Ultimately however, the ZNA owes much more to the guerrilla experience - in the form of the 'ZANU Idea' and the Dare system - than it does to Sandhurst and Camberley. Although there have been important professional developments built around a Command and Staff Course and British training methods, the revolutionary tradition tends to predominate. This is symbolised by the formation of the politically commissioned higher command echelon and their control over the more professional field officers. In this context it is important to note the highly centralised nature of the army high command. In structural terms, it is suitable for handling a maximum of 16,000 troops. Currently it controls 47,000 regular soldiers and 20,000 militia - a grand total of 67,000 personnel.⁶⁵ In effect the high command is an ex-ZANLA military clique or oligarchy of political and ethnic loyalists closely linked with the ZANU Politburo. Its supremacy is reinforced by party commissars and security officers throughout the army and by counter-vailing praetorian units - the Presidential Guard, the ZPM and the secret intelligence service.⁶⁶ Nevertheless the professional field officers are numerous. What then prevents a clash between

as it were, the 'politicals' and the 'professionals' in the ZNA officer corps? How is conflict and rivalry resolved? In short how does the ZNA work organisationally in terms of advancement and promotion? Before considering this array of questions it is necessary to make three observations. Firstly, I would suggest that, in the Zimbabwean military context, politicisation and professionalisation are not mutually exclusive but tend rather to complement each other. Secondly, this situation is facilitated largely because there is no sense of corporate identity within the Zimbabwean officer corps. There exists no sense of historical unity built around a separate, professional and a-political ethos. Thirdly, the ZNA High Command reflects many of the characteristics of the ZANU Politburo. The Politburo is almost exclusively Shona in composition. But it is not a monolith. It is a coalition of Shona sub-groups - Zezuru, Karanga and Manyika - whose interests have frequently diverged.⁶⁷ Unity has been secured by Mugabe's mastery of Dare arbitration techniques and through which factionalism is resolved and patronage equally dispersed. The ZNA mirrors this system of Dare centrality through its own methods of patronage and reward.

The ZNA officer corps is overwhelmingly Shona in composition. As such it is also divided into ethnic sub-groups. Most army officers are either Karanga or Zezuru. Lacking a corporate identity, professionally trained officers usually fall back upon their sub-group origin. They attach themselves to an ethnic army chef (Portuguese for 'chief' and derived from the guerrilla bases in Mozambique during the 1970s) who is in practice, a senior politically commissioned officer.⁶⁸ In this fashion Shona officers secure promotion and patronage. The chef system embraces mainly

ex-guerrillas but former Rhodesian Selous Scouts of Karanga or Zezuru origin have also benefited. Conversely, Ndebele ex-ZIPRA officers tend to rise and fall by the degree to which they have abandoned allegiance to ZAPU. Through the chef system the ZNA has a voice in the Politburo. Again the representation of military interests by politicised commanders in this way works against the institutionalisation of professionalism.

In terms of civil-military relations theory, control of the ZNA is subjective and informal rather than objective and bureaucratic.⁶⁹ The civil-military system is also 'permeated' through the composition of the Politburo.⁷⁰ Ex-guerrillas occupy ministerial posts and former ZNA officers have moved easily from the military into politics. Senior officers have openly amassed wealth and property and there is no mandatory term of office for general officers.⁷¹ Consequently, advancement is frequently lateral as well as vertical. Observing the dual military character of the ZNA and the interaction between professionalism and politicisation, one senior British Army officer likened the division to that between the American FBI and the Mafia: 'We (BMATT) turn African officers out of the Academy as pure as the FBI but the Mob always gets them in the end'.⁷² In conclusion the ZNA does not conform with the classical precepts of military professionalism, simply because the bulk of its soldiery spring from an African revolutionary war tradition. This has been partly influenced by Marxist-Leninist methodology, but is perhaps more decisively shaped by an indigeneous African socio-political milieu. In other words Zimbabwe has successfully Africanised its dualistic military heritage.

NOTES

- 1 Officially known as ZANU-PF (Patriotic Front) after 1980, but frequently referred to as simply ZANU.
- 2 Mugabe interview, New York Times, 28 Apr. 1980.
- 3 L.L.Mathews, 'Zimbabwe', in J.Keegan, (ed), World Armies (Detroit,1983),681-84.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 J.Nkomo, Nkomo: The Story of My Life (London,1984), 174-75.
- 6 Interview with Colonel A. Mutinhiri, Director of Army Training, ZNA, 18 Oct. 1984. Mutinhiri was a former member of the ZIPRA High Command.
- 7 Interview with Major-General J. Tungamirai, Chief of Staff (Operations), ZNA, 18 Sept. 1982. Tungamirai was ZANLA's Chief Political Commissar during the guerrilla war.
- 8 For a recent discussion see P. Pandya, Mao Tse-tung and Chimurenga:An Investigation into Zanu's strategies (Braamfontein 1988),
- 9 Interview with Tungamirai, 5 Dec. 1986. See also Pandya, op cit. Chapter 21.
- 10 The ZANU Politburo up until January 1988 contained only one Ndebele member, Enos Nkala, frequently regarded as a 'renegade' figure by many in ZAPU. Interview with W. Musarurwa, formerly ZAPU Publicity Secretary, 18 July 1985.
- 11 Discussion with Tungamirai, 24 Oct. 1986.
- 12 E. Zvobgo, 'The ZANU Idea', in G. Baumhogger, The Struggle for Independence: Documents on the Recent Development of Zimbabwe 1975-1980, (7 Vols), Document 28 Vol 2, 23-24.
- 13 Interview with K. Flower, Director-General, Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesian) Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), 1964-81, 14 Apr. 1982.
- 14 Ibid. This interpretation was preferred to the idea of any 'reconciliation' on Mugabe's part.
- 15 Nkomo did not however, gain control of police intelligence (Special Branch) which was transferred to the Prime Minister's Office. This weakened the significance of Nkomo's portfolio within ZIPRA. Interview with Flower, 14 Apr. 1982.
- 16 (The) Herald, (Harare),5 June 1980. Interview with Brigadier M. Shute, Officer Commanding 1 Brigade (Bulawayo), 18 Mar. 1982.
- 17 B. Lapping, End of Empire (London, Paladin edition, 1989),574-

- 18 BMATT personnel studied the experience of Carnot in Revolutionary France and of Trotsky in Bolshevik Russia but could find few parallels with Zimbabwe's situation, simply because of the ethnic dimension and the unique fact that there were three armies involved in the merger process. Interview with BMATT officers who requested anonymity, 5 Apr. 1984.
- 19 'Zimbabwe: the army', Africa Confidential(1982), XXIII,xxv, 4-5.
- 20 See the testimony of Lieutenant-General Lookout Masuku in Herald, 8 and 24 Feb; 8 Apr. 1983 during the later ZIPRA treason trial.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Nkomo, op cit, 220-23
- 23 See the detailed statement by Brigadier C. Grey, a former senior ZIPRA commander in The Chronicle (Bulawayo), 8 Apr, 1983.
- 24 Zimbabwe. Department of Information Press Statement 197/81/SFS, 'Prime Minister's Address on National Army', 16 Mar. 1981.
- 25 For the list of commissions see Herald, 17 Apr. 1981. For dispositions see Zimbabwe. Office of the Prime Minister Press Statement 1433/82/JS/PR, 'ZNA Senior Ranks and Appointments', 22 Oct. 1982.
- 26 ZNA Directive (Confidential) 5 July 1981. Copy in author's possession. See also Herald, 17 Apr. 1981.
- 27 See Nkomo, op cit, Chapter 21.
- 28 Three brigadiers and a colonel were arrested on the grounds of treason.
- 29 Two senior ex-ZIPRA officers headed the Directorate of Army Training and an Ndebele colonel was appointed Commandant of the Staff College. In 1989, an Ndebele brigadier commanded the ZNA Special Task Force (STF) in Mozambique.
- 30 This was the assessment made by Zimbabwean military intelligence. Discussion with Colonel S. Sobusa Gazi, Director of Military Intelligence, 6 June 1984.
- 31 Much information on the role of BMATT can be found in issues of the monthly Zimbabwe National Army Magazine (Harare) especially between 1983-86.
- 32 See 'New Zimbabwe Order of Battle', in Armed Forces (Johannesburg) Feb. 1981.
- 33 Zimbabwe Staff College. Loose Minute 3/1/10/4 Directive for Command and Staff Course Directing Staff, HQ. ZSC.21 Jan. 1986.
- 34 See the views of successive BMATT Commanders: Major-General P. Palmer, ZNA Review, 6 Oct. 1981; Brigadiers E. Jones, Herald, 25 Feb. 1985 and R. Hodges, The Times (London), 11 Mar. 1987.
- 35 Private views expressed to the author by various BMATT personnel.

- 36 Very little scholarly work exists on North Korean-African relations. For a rare discussion see P. Chaigneau and R. Sola, 'North Korea as an African Power: A Threat to French Interests', Strategic Review (Pretoria, Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, Dec. 1986), 1-19. Zimbabwe is briefly mentioned in C. Mackerras, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea in World Affairs (Griffith University, Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations, Australia-Asia Papers No. 27, Aug. 1984), 33-34.
- 37 In the early years of independence Juche in particular was a fashionable subject within ZANU and, much discussed in the media. See Zimbabwe. Department of Information Press Statement 79/82/SFS, 'President's Address on Zimbabwe's Relations with the DPRK', 18 Aug. 1982.
- 38 See the reports in (The)Sunday Mail(Harare), 30 Aug. 1981 and The Chronicle 31 Aug. 1981 on the military aspects of the agreement.
- 39 Between 3,500 and 5,000 ex-Zanla guerrillas were brigaded at Tongogara Camp, Chipinge in Eastern Zimbabwe.
- 40 Zimbabwe. Department of Information Press Statement 629/81/SFS 'North Korean Training Team Here', 14 Aug. 1981. This was a statement by Mugabe.
- 42 Discussion with ZNA officers, 5 Aug. 1984. For a discussion of the North Korean Army see Keegan, 'North Korea', in Keegan (ed), World Armies, 338-43.
- 43 Ibid. Discussion with Brigadier P. Shiri, formerly Commander, Five Brigade, 16 Aug. 1984.
- 44 The most devastating information can be found in The Sunday Times (London), 15 Apr. 1984 and in The Observer (London), 15 Apr. 1984
- 45 Discussions ZNA military intelligence personnel.
- 46 For views on the ZPM see the Zimbabwe National Army Magazine, July 1986, 24-26.
- 47 Kim Chang Ha, The Immortal Ideas of Juche (Pyongyang, 1984, English language edition), 309.
- 48 Zimbabwe. Defence (Zimbabwe People's Militia) (Non-Commissioned Members) (General) Regulations gazetted by the Defence Forces Services Commission, May 1985.
- 49 This was the assessment made by Shiri. Another complaint concerned equipment procurement. North Korean equipment was obsolescent.
- 50 See M. Evans 'The Security Threat from South Africa', in C. Stoneman (ed), Zimbabwe's Prospects: Issues of Race, Class, State Class and Capital in Southern Africa London, 1988), 218-35.

- 51 See for example the somewhat one-dimensional work of D. Martin and P. Johnson, 'Zimbabwe: Apartheid's Dilemma', in Martin and Johnson (eds), Destructive Engagement: Southern Africa at War (Harare, 1986), 43-72. See also H. H. Patel, 'Zimbabwe', Survival (1988), XXX, 38-58. Despite their profile none of these writers was invited to the Zimbabwe Staff College to teach on security issues, although Patel did lecture on the non-aligned movement and international relations.
- 52 See R. Martin, 'Regional security in southern Africa: More Angolas Mozambiques or neutrals?', Survival (1987), XXIX, 387-402.
- 53 All of these problems were identified by BMATT and pointed out to the Ministry of Defence and ZNA Headquarters.
- 54 Zimbabwe Staff College 3/1/1 'The Development of Tactical Doctrine at the ZSC', (restricted), 27 June 1985.
- 55 BMATT were reluctant to teach Total Strategy on the basis that it was really a theory of international relations. But the British did assist in procuring reading resources. The works of such scholars as H. Giliomee, H. Adam, D. Moodie, L. Thompson P. Frankel, K. Grundy, D. Geldenhuys and R. Jaster were amongst the works obtained by the ZNA.
- 56 See R. Weitzer, 'Responding to South African Hegemony: The Case of Zimbabwe', paper presented at the annual meeting of the American African Studies Association, New Orleans, 23-26 Nov. 1985, 2-7.
- 57 See for instance the Catholic Church's report, 'Reconciliation is still possible', Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference, Harare. 19 Mar. 1983.
- 58 According to Weitzer, 'In Search of Regime Security: Zimbabwe Since Independence', Journal of Modern African Studies (1984) XXII, 529-57.
- 59 A ZANU-ZAPU unity agreement was signed on 22 Dec. 1987. Under this accord ZAPU was absorbed into ZANU-PF.
- 60 The treaty was signed on 12 Jan. 1981. Some ZNA officers compared the commitment to a 'mini-Vietnam'. Interviews with STF officers.
- 61 For a discussion see Evans 'The Security Threat...', 227-31.
- 62 One of the major operational problems was the determination to direct the campaign from Harare as opposed to devolving responsibility to a forward field headquarters. This resulted in severe inflexibility in the field deployment.
- 63 See Mugabe's remarks in Herald, 12 Nov. 1986.

- 64 'Mozambique Confusion at home, silence abroad', Africa Confidential (1991), XXXII, 6-7.
- 65 For ZNA force levels see The Military Balance 1990-1991 (London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990), 147. This indicates an even further rise to 51,600.
- 66 There is also a Police Internal Security Intelligence Service (PISI) alongside the CIO and the Special Branch.
- 67 This was the position up until the ZANU-ZAPU unity agreement. Since then the Politburo has been expanded to include six former ZAPU members in a body of 24 persons. However, it is significant that the service commanders remain Shona and ex-ZANLA leaders.
- 68 I am indebted to ZNA officers, especially former black Rhodesian regulars, for an insight into this system and its mechanics. Several guerrilla veterans also provided information on the importance of regional affiliations.
- 69 The definition is drawn from S. P. Huntington's classic work The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge, Mass.), 83.
- 70 See A. R. Luckham, 'A Comparative Typology of Civil-Military Relations', Government and Opposition (1971), VI, 5-35; E. A. Nordlinger, Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments (Englewood Cliffs, 1977), 15-19.
- 71 The current ZNA Commander Lieutenant-General Solomon Tapfumaneyi Mujuru (formerly known by his Chimurenga nom de guerre of Rex Nhongo until 1986) is alleged to have extensive business interests and appeared before the 1989 Sandura Commission into official corruption. He appears to have survived the inquiry. Mujuru has commanded the ZNA since its inception.
- 72 Discussion with a British Chief Instructor at the Zimbabwe Staff College.