

9 | *Gukurahundi and Zimbabwe's Place in the 1980s Cold War*

This chapter examines the fundamental shift in thinking among international and regional diplomats over the meaning of a “race state” in Zimbabwe once the settler state had been officially replaced. Zimbabwe’s relatively late decolonization process took place during a heightened Cold War competition between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets, which therefore made Zimbabwe an important addition to the balance sheet of pro-Western allies in Africa. This alliance would allow Mugabe and his colleagues to take advantage of Cold War obsessions in American and British thinking as ZANU carried out a campaign to destroy Nkomo and ZAPU as a political rival. For Nkomo and ZAPU, given their longstanding support from the Soviets, this new dispensation in Zimbabwe would turn out to be disastrous in terms of Nkomo’s inability to obtain any sort of external support, and, at times, even an audience, as he and ZAPU were attacked by Mugabe and ZANU in the early 1980s. This state violence carried out against the opposition is increasingly well documented in the literature, so this chapter will continue to focus on how Western diplomats read, interpreted, and rationalized this violence in the context of their own agendas of defending Mugabe and Zimbabwe’s policies of racial conciliation as a Cold War success story. There is a large literature on the impact of Operation *Gukurahundi*.¹ What follows in this chapter is a look at the diplomatic responses to events,

¹ See Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (Harare: CCJPZ and LRF, 1999), reprinted in *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007); Lloyd M. Sachikonye, *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011); Shari Eppel, “‘Gukurahundi’: The Need for Truth and Reparation,” in Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage, eds., *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2005), 43–62; Stuart Doran, *Kingdom*,

with some new sources from the British archives covering BMATT and Department of Defence files.

A significant dynamic to highlight in this chapter is the often-contradictory Zimbabwe–South Africa relations in the early 1980s. The diplomatic, military, and security archives suggest that while both countries were involved in a competitive rhetorical opposition, there was also a good deal of cooperation on the issue of security. This came about as interests coalesced around Mugabe and ZANU’s attempts to destroy ZAPU through claims of “restoring law and order” and ending dissident activity, and South Africa’s attempts to secure cooperation from Zimbabwe around issues of the South African ANC’s MK operatives (members of its armed wing) entering South African territory. In the sort of “cat and mouse” diplomacy over these two needs, there was a cooperation between the Zimbabwean and South African governments that helped to further marginalize Nkomo and ZAPU. That is, while the Zimbabweans publicly called out South African support for dissidents operating in Zimbabwe, they also understood that these South African trained and equipped “Super-ZAPU” dissidents were not operating on a scale that would significantly undermine the Zimbabwean state. In some ways, the continued activities by Super ZAPU in 1984 helped the ruling party to justify to Zimbabweans the all-important state-of-emergency powers that permitted detention without trial and indemnity for soldiers and politicians against being held personally responsible for state crimes committed under their leadership. This was useful from the standpoint of consolidating ZANU power, and to potentially move toward the creation of a one-party state.²

Power, Glory: Mugabe, ZANU and the Quest for Supremacy, 1960–1987 (Midrand, South Africa: Sithatha Media, 2017); Timothy Scarnecchia, “Rationalizing ‘Gukurahundi’: Cold War and South African Foreign Relations with Zimbabwe, 1981–1983.” *Kronos* (November 2011), 87–103; Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the Dark Forests of Matabeleland, Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); David Coltart, *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2016).

² See John Hatchard, *Individual Freedoms and State Security in the African Context: The Case of Zimbabwe* (London: James Currey 1993); George Karekwaivanane, *The Struggle over State Power in Zimbabwe: Law and Politics since 1950* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 184–214.

The South African goal with Super ZAPU was to destabilize ZAPU's ability to provide further shelter to the South African ANC, while also causing problems for Mugabe's government. As it would turn out, the ex-ZIPRA dissidents were often unable to maintain supplies themselves, especially guns and ammunition, so the South African-supported "Super ZAPU" stood out due to being relatively well supplied.³ Therefore, it is important to remember that while South Africa did support "Super ZAPU" dissidents in Zimbabwe, it was not intended as an all-out attempt to destabilize the government as in the cases of Mozambique and Angola. As Stephan Chan describes it, "Zimbabwe was not the main military target. Angola and Mozambique were. The idea was to make Zimbabwe and Zambia feel as if they were caught, west and east, in a pincer – so anxious that the conflict on the borders should not overspill that they dared not look south."⁴

The dissidents in Zimbabwe were also not the same as the ZIPRA army before independence, even though Mugabe and others in ZANU would consistently claim that they were. The treason charges against ZIPRA's generals, Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa, had been thrown out in Zimbabwean courts. However, Mugabe and ZANU had both of these ZIPRA leaders immediately detained without charges following their acquittal.⁵ Similarly, the Mugabe government secretly cooperated with the South Africans to monitor MK activities in Zimbabwe and met regularly to share intelligence.⁶ South Africa had demonstrated clearly in 1981 and 1982, in particular, that it could successfully carry out covert missions in Zimbabwe. The assassination of South African ANC representative Joe Gqabi outside of his home in Harare was a clear message, as was the destruction of ZANU arms

³ See Phyllis Johnson and David Martin, *Apartheid Terrorism: the Destabilisation Report* (London: James Currey 1989), 68–69.

⁴ Stephan Chan, *Southern Africa: Old Treacheries and New Deceits* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 35–36.

⁵ See Karekwaivanane, *Struggle over State Power*, 199; Judith Todd, *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 2007), 147–66; Eliakim Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union, 1961–87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 249–54.

⁶ See, for example, exchanges between the Zimbabwean and South African security forces, and records of meetings, in the folder "Zimbabwe: Relations with SA" 1/156/3, vol. 37, DFA Archives, Pretoria.

returned from Mozambique at the Inkomi depot in August 1981, and the Thornhill destruction of the Hunter jets in July 1982.⁷ In December 1981, there was an unsuccessful attempt to kill the ZANU-PF Central Committee in their Harare headquarters. The bomb was detonated in a room above where they were due to meet but the Central Committee had postponed the meeting.⁸ Such actions, and the threat of greater destabilization, kept Mugabe and Mnangagwa cooperative with the South Africans in periodic mutual security talks between the SADF and the South African Police and Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation and ZNA representatives, which came with a commitment from the Zimbabweans to share intelligence on the MK in Zimbabwe.⁹

1983: Zimbabwe's "Terrible Year"

The previous chapter has set the stage for the tragic events of 1983. With an increase in dissident activities in the Matabeleland North and South provinces and Midlands province in December 1982, and in the midst of British pressure over the detained Air Force personnel, the decision was made by Mugabe and his closest associates to deploy the 5 Brigade, consisting of between 2,500 and 3,500 soldiers, to take over security operations in these three provinces in February 1983. Made up almost entirely of chiShona speaking former ZANLA fighters, the 5

- ⁷ Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger, *Violence and Memory*, 189; see also Geoffrey Nyarota, *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsmen* (Cape Town: Struik, 2006), 86–89; Eliakim Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union, 1961–87* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press 2005), 249–354.
- ⁸ Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 108.
- ⁹ See, for example, "Memo to Directeur General Van Wentzel," 14/3/1983, South African National Archives (SANA), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), 1/156/1, vol. 126, Zimbabwe Political Situation and Development, 1/3/83 to 13/3/83. The minutes for the September 6, 1983 meeting between SADF and Central Intelligence Organisation representatives continues to show cooperation, although a detailed summary by the Central Intelligence Organisation of alleged "SADF Assistance to ZPRA and Dissidents in Botswana" is missing from the file, as the paragraph numbers jump from 24 to 32 on consecutively numbered pages in the file, 112–111. "Minutes of Meeting Held on 6 September 1983 at Beit Bridge Zimbabwe Between a Zimbabwe CIO/ZNA Delegation and Representatives of the SADF and the SAP," Foreign Affairs (DFA), 1/156/3, vol. 37, Zimbabwe: Relations with Zimbabwe, DFA Archives.

Brigade's operation was called '*Gukurahundi*', a chiShona term that translates as "the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains." This term had been used by ZANU before, including in the operation to capture and discipline the Nhari rebels in 1974, and Mugabe and ZANU declared 1979 as "*Gore re Gukurahundi*," which was translated as "the year of the people's storm," in a ZANU pamphlet, signifying that it would represent the final push in the liberation war to a ZANU victory.

Evidence shows that there was not unanimous support of the use of the 5 Brigade against civilians, particularly as some of the intelligence officers – including some who had planned the Rhodesian military's counterinsurgency efforts during the war – understood that the use of brutal force to "discipline" civilians was not going to end the dissident problem. There was, therefore, some irony in having former Rhodesian intelligence officers attempt to restrain Mugabe and others in ZANU from using the 5 Brigade in this manner. On the other hand, it is also the case that Mugabe and others wanted to use force not simply to root out dissidents, but to bring Nkomo and ZAPU to their knees with the erroneous belief that ZAPU supporters would capitulate and recognize ZANU as the sole "one-party" government.

A useful survey of ZANU and ZAPU assessments of what should be done about the dissidents comes from a series of interviews carried out by British minister of state Cranley Onslow, who spent four days in Zimbabwe from January 5 to 8, 1983. This trip occurred before the 5 Brigade was deployed, but the British were receiving intelligence of violence against civilians by the ZNA and the special police units already punishing civilians for alleged support of dissidents since 1982. The main concern about Zimbabwe in the British press and from members of parliament in January 1983 remained reports of alleged torture of the white Air Force personnel detained and awaiting trial for their role in the Thornhill Air Force base bombings, some of whom were British citizens. Onslow was sent personally to Zimbabwe to relay the decision of Thatcher and the British military to replace the destroyed Hunter jets. As Onslow made the rounds to inform various Zimbabwean ministers of this decision, he asked if they would try to keep the decision secret, given the current British domestic criticisms of Mugabe's government. Onslow also asked almost everyone he interviewed for an update of the security situation in the Matabeleland provinces. His trip occurred prior to the deployment of the 5 Brigade,

but the responses he received are informative of the mindset and opinions of key Zimbabwean politicians just as plans were being made for deploying the 5 Brigade.

Minister Onslow told Minister of State (Defence) Dr. Sidney Sekeramayi "that it would be invaluable to opinion outside (and inside) Zimbabwe if it could be made clear that disciplinary action would be taken against members of the security forces who overstepped the mark."¹⁰ Such a question indicates that the British already had information that the ZNA, police, and Central Intelligence Organisation agents were engaged in violence against civilians prior to the deployment of 5 Brigade. It is also significant that Onslow was willing to bring this up directly with Sekeramayi. Sekeramayi replied that he was convinced the dissident activities could be stopped if Nkomo and ZAPU would give orders to the "ZAPU local infrastructure," who, he claimed, "was involved in what was happening." He also said "that he wasn't too worried about the situation in Matabeleland." He believed that the military could contain it and stop it. His main point was that the Western powers and media would not understand the government's response. "If they [the Zimbabwean government] took a soft line over the situation in Matabeleland, it would be termed 'ineffective,' but if it took the tough action necessary, it would be termed 'brutal.'" Sekeramayi said that "in the long run, people would prefer a strong government to one which allowed itself to be held ransom." He told Onslow that "he therefore hoped for a degree of sympathy from the Western press for tough action to sort out the problem once and for all." Onslow, like his American counterparts, told Sekeramayi that "he had no control over the press." Sekeramayi's responses to Onslow's questions suggests that the ZANU leadership were already contemplating the launch of a much more violent campaign against dissidents and ZAPU supporters than had already transpired in early January.

Minister Onslow also spoke with John Nkomo, a ZAPU politician who remained in government after Joshua Nkomo's expulsion. John Nkomo served as minister of state in the deputy prime minister's office at the time of the meeting. Unlike Sekeramayi, John Nkomo did not

¹⁰ "Record of a Meeting between Mr Cranley Onslow MP, Minister of State, FCO and Dr. Sidney Sekeramayi, Minister of State (Defence) Zimbabwe on 6 January," FCO 105/1411, BNA.

agree that ZAPU's leadership could control the dissidents. He believed most of the ex-ZIPRA soldiers who had become dissidents had done so out of jealousy toward ZANU and ex-ZANLA soldiers, and the boredom and lack of employment after demobilization. He said that many were criminals, "but, to acquire credibility among the people, claimed adherence to ZAPU and condemned the 'ZANU' government. Rural people had no access to information and were inclined to believe the dissidents, especially if they backed their claims with arms." Onslow asked John Nkomo whether or not it was "desirable to find a way to meet the political demands which commanded sympathy and thus undermine the dissidents." Nkomo replied how "it was difficult to deal with people who claimed to act in the name of ZAPU but in fact had no connection with them, and indeed did not hesitate to kill ZAPU members." He also argued that ZAPU was hesitant to get involved, "as they would do nothing to create the impression that Zimbabwe was divided into two parts." Like many who spoke to Onslow, John Nkomo suggested that there was evidence of an "external element," meaning South Africa, "seeking to destabilise Zimbabwe under the cover of dissidents."¹¹

Perhaps the most interesting meeting Onslow had with ZANU leaders was with the deputy prime minister, Simon Muzenda. Muzenda was a very popular politician in Zimbabwe, as he tended to speak in ways that nonelite Zimbabweans trusted. Most interestingly, when asked by Onslow about the internal situation, he said it was "worrying," and also that "the problem was political." Muzenda placed the emphasis on the political conflict caused by Mugabe's rivalry with Joshua Nkomo, rather than ethnicity. He noted that Mugabe was meeting with Nkomo and trying to work toward a political solution and reconciliation. He also said that "there were doubts whether the dissidents were under central control." Continuing to present a case much different from the harsh messages Mnangagwa, Nkala, and Mugabe would present publicly, Muzenda described how [t]he dissidence was not a tribal conflict. "ZAPU feared they would be permanently excluded from power in a (ZANU) one party state: these fears were being exploited by outside powers. Ex-ZIPRA combatants were also aggrieved about the

¹¹ "Record of Meeting between Mr Cranley Onslow MP, Minister of State, FCO and Mr John Nkomo, Minister of State in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office on 7 January 1983," FCO 105/1411, BNA.

confiscation of farms."¹² Perhaps a voice of reason at the top echelons of ZANU, Muzenda complicated the dominant script coming from ZANU hardliners. That script characterized Nkomo as a "tribalist," seeking revenge for losing the election by secretly controlling the ex-ZIPRA dissidents. John Nkomo and Simon Muzenda had certainly given Onslow a more nuanced way of interpreting the dissident challenge to the Zimbabwean state.

After meeting with Onslow directly, Mugabe would later tell diplomats that he had been bothered by Onslow's message about the treatment of the Air Force servicemen. Mugabe wrote directly to Thatcher on January 7 to lodge his complaint. He wrote to Thatcher that "I have now, once again, expressed the attitude of my Government to that case." He continued, "At the same time, I have also expressed to him [Onslow] my dismay at the accusation of the violation of human rights levelled at my Government by you and your Government at a time when we are doing our best to make the situation here more peaceful."¹³ Mugabe then made the case that given all the efforts to subvert his government by South Africa and those former Rhodesians working with the South Africans, they refused "to be stampeded into hasty actions whose possible effect might be to curtail civil liberties." Mugabe let Thatcher know, "What we need is a little word of encouragement and acknowledgement of what we have managed to achieve so far even with the tremendous odds that faced us at Independence." He then thanked her for agreeing to sell the Hunter jets.¹⁴

When Onslow returned to London and wrote his report for the secretary of state, a copy of which was later annotated by Thatcher, he characterized the Matabeleland issue as "tribal" in nature, but at least situated the demands of the dissidents in contemporary issues. "In Matabeleland the root cause of the trouble is almost certainly tribal, involving gangs of former ZIPRA men, and closely associated with land tenure problems." Onslow did, however, ascribe some of the blame to Mugabe. "In dealing with this the government scores less well. Mugabe does not disguise his bitterness about the attitude of his old adversary

¹² "Record of Meeting between Mr Cranley Onslow MP, Minister of State, FCO and Mr Simon Muzenda, Deputy Prime Minister on 6 January 1983," FCO 105/1411, BNA.

¹³ Prime Minister Robert Mugabe to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, January 7, 1983, PREM 19/1154, BNA.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Joshua Nkomo.” Onslow reported that members of Mugabe’s cabinet “spend long hours trying to ensure that the tribal rivalry does not get out of control.” And that “as long as Nkomo remains in the wilderness, the potential for friction is there, and Mugabe evidently believes that it is being exploited by South Africa.”¹⁵ This last sentence summarizes two ways that Mugabe and his colleagues shaped British diplomatic opinion to fit the idea that Nkomo and South Africa presented a combined threat to Mugabe’s government. Onslow’s report was done on January 18, before the *Gukurahundi* operations of the 5 Brigade were reported.

There is not sufficient space to discuss in detail the initial 5 Brigade violence of January and February 1983. The report released in 1997 by the Catholic Committee for Justice and Peace and the Bulawayo lawyers working with them remains the most detailed account of the violence by those who survived or witnessed it.¹⁶ It is important, however, to note that the British military and High Commissioner Byatt were well informed of the atrocities. A report from February 1983, addressed to the Ministry of Defence and from S. T. W. Anderson, a British defence advisor based in the high commissioner’s office in Harare, is prefaced with “please find attached reports concerning ZNA acts of brutality in Matabeleland.” The report contains a great deal of evidence from doctors and from Catholic priests and the Bishop of Matabeleland, Henry Karlen. The first section is Anderson’s summary of a conversation he had on February 17 with a medical doctor, who was leaving the country after serving as a mission doctor in Matabeleland since 1969. The doctor’s evidence reported how ZNA “soldiers have lists of ex-ZIPRA deserters and these are used in interrogation.” The doctor said that if villagers denied knowing the names, they could be killed, “as can equally a report of having seen or heard of him.” The soldiers would also at times “make new footprints around a kraal after dark” and if these were not reported the following morning, it would be “used as an excuse to shoot or beat those in the kraal.” Another example of the ZNA’s deadly behavior was that soldiers would “[s]ometimes . . . pretend to be

¹⁵ To Secretary of State from Cranley Onslow, January, 18, 1983, PREM 19/1154 0.

¹⁶ Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence*.

dissidents and entice the locals to provide assistance. To do so of course then ends in death."¹⁷

A copy of Bishop Karlen's letter to Mugabe dated February 12, 1983 is included in the materials. Karlen wrote to inform him that he had "been receiving reports of violence perpetrated by the 5th Brigade against civilians in those areas of my Diocese under martial law." Referring to a statement of Sekeramayi made in Parliament, he said, "I was surprised that the Government was not aware of the behaviour and brutal approach of the 5th Brigade who terrorise and intimidate the population through murder of men, women, and children, and beating administered to innocent people of the community." To address Sekeramayi's characterization of the reports as civilians caught in a crossfire, Karlen stated, "At no time has there been a mention of killing innocent people in crossfire. Many cases of rape, even of primary school girls, were brought to our notice." Karlen then referred to motive. "It seems to be the deliberate and indiscriminate revenge on the Matabele people. People have spoken already of a policy of genocide, as this has been expressed by some of the Brigade." Karlen mentioned that people in unaffected areas were fearful that the brigade would be deployed there. "Such deployment would confirm our fears that a policy of genocide is being contemplated."¹⁸

The file includes Karlen's notes from his travels to different mission hospitals, such as St. Luke's/St. Paul's in Lupane. His notes indicate that in a two-day period, (February 6 to 8), "27 people with gunshot wounds came or were brought to St. Luke's Hospital as well as 31 assault cases. It could not be established how many people were killed, but a number of corpses have been seen. Soldiers do not bother about the injured and the bodies are left lying about." He concluded, "It seems there is indiscriminate shooting and beating up of women, children and men. People have the impression that the Matabele are being crushed."¹⁹

¹⁷ "Meeting Between DA and Dr – 17 Feb 1983," contained in Defence Advisor to Ministry of Defence, "Events in Matabeleland," February 1983 [no day provided], item 40/1, DEFE 13/1740, BNA. A "kraal" is the name for a rural homestead in southern Africa.

¹⁸ Bishop Henry Karlen to Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, February 12, 1983. contained in Defence Advisor to Ministry of Defence, "Events in Matabeleland," February 1983 [no day provided], item 40/1, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

¹⁹ Ibid. For a detailed account of the *Gukurahundi* in the Nkayi and Lupane Districts, see Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger, *Violence and Memory*, 217–24.

Other materials included in the defence advisor's report included a statement from Father Pius Ncube, who reported that "the Fifth Brigade 'Gukurahundi' are cruel and ruthless on the civilians." He reported that when civilians could not identify dissidents, the soldiers "beat the people mercilessly or shoot them." Among other casualty figures, Father Ncube reported that "[a]t Mlagise North of Gwaai Sdg [Siding] more than 50 were shot dead."²⁰ A report was provided to Bishop Karlen of an exchange on February 9 between a military commander and one of the people in the audience of survivors outside the clinic arranged to hear from the 5 Brigade officers:

Father of 6 month old baby whose mother was shot and killed with the baby on the back, asks what he should do now. Reply from the soldier next to the Commander: 'You should be dead – you must have run away.' The nurses should not treat the injured but kill them. He was cautioned by the Commander.²¹

These reports were mostly based on observations of only a few days at the beginning of the 5 Brigade activities. It would have certainly been sufficient evidence to raise alarms in London. Journalists thereafter began to present more evidence of killings, beatings, rape, and torture. It was not possible, therefore, for the Zimbabwean government to keep the evidence from the wider world. One of the most perceptive accounts came from the *Guardian's* Nick Davies, who summarized the situation in March of 1983, as follows: "The slaughter of innocent villages in Matabeleland is only the most bloody symptom of a Government clampdown which has seen thousands detained without trial, opponents tortured, the press muzzled, the courts defied and trade unions brought to heel." Davies then identified the core issues at stake. "The Government's response has been equally direct – a deliberate and determined campaign to wipe out the dissidents, to liquidate Joshua Nkomo's Zapu party which is accused of directing them, and to cause

²⁰ "Report on Incidents Involving Atrocities committed by the Government Forces in the Gwaai Siding Area between 30th January and 1st February 1983," contained in Defence Advisor to Ministry of Defence, "Events in Matabeleland," February 1983 [no day provided], item 40/1, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

²¹ "List of Patients Admitted to St. Luke's Hospital from 25.1.83–13.2–83," contained in Defence Advisor to Ministry of Defence, "Events in Matabeleland," February 1983 [no day provided], item 40/1, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

such terror among ordinary civilians that their popular support will wither.”²² Davies reported of the hope among liberal supporters of Mugabe that perhaps Mugabe was somehow unaware of the 5 Brigade atrocities:

It is a thin hope. . . . His own words seem to many to implicate him. In a speech on dissidents to the Zimbabwe Assembly last July, he [Mugabe] warned: ‘Some of the measures we shall take are measures which will be extra-legal. . . . An eye for an eye and an ear for an ear may not be adequate in our circumstances. We might very well demand two ears for one ear and two eyes for one eye.’”²³

As Ian Phimister points out, the Western media was surprisingly well informed about the atrocities very early on in 1983, making the lack of international response all the more telling given more powerful Cold War and regional interests.²⁴

Nkomo's Temporary Exile to Britain

The entrance of the 5 Brigade into Bulawayo on March 5, 1983 also turned into a search for Joshua Nkomo. As Eliakim Sibanda wrote, “Nkomo's house was searched and ransacked. . . . Nkomo beat the military dragnet and fled to Britain via Botswana on March 9, 1983.”²⁵ Nkomo's driver was killed in the attack on his house, and many thought the 5 Brigade were planning to kill Nkomo. After a brief stay in Botswana, Nkomo travelled to Lusaka, Zambia, and then London where a cold reception awaited him from the now pro-ZANU, pro-Mugabe British government. While Nkomo was still in Gaborone, Botswana, the British tried unsuccessfully to pressure Nkomo not to fly to London, with the British high commissioner Wilfred Jones reading Nkomo Britain's “Fugitive Offenders Act,” to which Nkomo, according to Jones, “stopped me angrily, saying that this was threatening him and he would not have it.” Jones pleaded with Nkomo to reconsider the implications of his traveling to London, telling Nkomo: “He must realise the difficulty of the situation and the

²² Nick Davies, “The Massacre that Misfired,” *Guardian* (March 23, 1983), 15.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Ian Phimister, “The Making and Meanings of the Massacres in Matabeleland,” *Development Dialogues* 50 (2008), 199–218.

²⁵ Sibanda, *Zimbabwe African People's Union*, 262.

embarrassment that could be caused all round if he took such a step.” Nkomo replied in his usual style. “He acknowledged the sensitivity of the situation but said that he had taken many decisions in his life which were thought unwise at the time but subsequently proved right.” Jones remarked, “Despite further pressure from me he would not budge and gave no undertaking.”²⁶ Nkomo’s flight to London therefore caused alarm among British officials to the point that Thatcher weighed in on just how long he should be allowed to stay in Britain. Eager to not upset Mugabe and ZANU, Thatcher responded to a brief on Nkomo’s presence in London by noting in handwriting across the top, “He [Nkomo] has been given one week only. I see no reason why he should stay here indefinitely.” The brief also mentioned that Zambian president Kaunda could perhaps receive Nkomo, but it appeared that Kaunda and Zambia “would try to avoid this. President Kaunda has been at pains since Zimbabwe’s independence to remain neutral in Mr. Nkomo’s quarrel with Mr. Mugabe.”²⁷ British Cabinet notes from March 24, 1983 indicate that Nkomo had “kept a low profile” while in London for a month, and he had “no formal contacts” with the government. Thatcher mentioned that she had talked with President Kaunda about Nkomo’s situation. Kaunda had told Thatcher that “there could be no prospect of reconciliation between the conflicting parties in Zimbabwe unless Mr. Nkomo returned to the country.” Kaunda had told Thatcher that he was trying to work with the Commonwealth secretary general to help facilitate Nkomo’s return, adding that “[t]here was little doubt that his life might be in danger if he returned.” Thatcher ended the discussion by noting that “it would be undesirable for the British Government to have to extend the one month period for which Mr Nkomo had been given permission to remain in the United Kingdom.”²⁸

All of these cold shoulders must have been extremely difficult for Nkomo to take, especially looking back at his substantial efforts working with David Owen’s earlier attempts to negotiate with Smith to put

²⁶ From Gaborone to FCO, “Your Telno 042: Nkomo,” March 11, 1983, PREM 19/1154, BNA. Thatcher had read this telno, as she initialed it and it has her characteristic underlining.

²⁷ R. B. Bone FCO to A. J. Cole, PM’s Office, “Nkomo,” March 14, 1983, PREM 19/1154, BNA.

²⁸ “Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Thursday 24 March 1983,” CC(83) 11th Conclusions CAB 2–3, 128/76/11, BNA.

Nkomo in charge, not to mention the years of support Nkomo received from Kaunda. The 1980 elections had forced Nkomo into an international political wilderness. A South African intelligence report from this time noted that the Soviet ambassador in Lusaka had scrambled to make sure Nkomo did not head to Moscow, again not wanting to upset their plans to warm up to Mugabe at this time.²⁹ Nkomo would spend five months in Britain and returned “when the [Zimbabwean] Government tried to deprive him of his Parliamentary seat.”³⁰

In February 1983, when the first reports of the *Gukurahundi* violence were making it to the international community, the Americans and the British met to discuss what line to take with Mugabe over the situation. The American account of a meeting between the British minister of state, Cranley Onslow, and US assistant secretary of state for Africa, Chester Crocker, indicates that both Britain and the United States wanted to support Mugabe and his government, rather than publicly criticize the Zimbabwean government for the 5 Brigade atrocities. The notes from the meeting state that “when asked whether Garfield Todd’s reaction that this was the beginning of the end of reconciliation didn’t make sense, Onslow replied that one could make the case that Mugabe no longer believes that Nkomo will contribute to the reconciliation process.” Crocker reportedly responded to Onslow “that Mugabe does not appear to have given Nkomo a chance and expressed concern that the present situation could acquire its own dynamic in the United States, negatively affecting both the outcome of the current budget hearings and our ability to handle questions from the press.” The Americans reported that “[b]oth sides agreed that while we should not try to make excuses for the GOZ [Government of Zimbabwe], the situation does argue strongly for not turning our back on Mugabe and opening the door for South African destabilization or Soviet intervention.”³¹ When Onslow met with Crocker and Wisner a week earlier, Crocker and Wisner were clear that the Cold War implications of Western support for Mugabe meant that the news

²⁹ “Zimbabwe: Uitwyning van Joshua Nkomo” [“Zimbabwe: Expulsion of Joshua Nkomo”], March 16, 1983. DFA 1/156/198.6, South African DFA archives, Pretoria.

³⁰ High Commissioner Ewans, “Annual Report, 1983,” January 3, 1984, item 6, FCO36/1929, BNA.

³¹ Secretary of State to American Embassy London, “Crocker meeting with UK Minister of State Cranley Onslow,” February 26, 1983, Case No F-2017-0020, <https://tinyurl.com/ydh8d4kp>.

from Matabeleland should not induce any rash response from the Anglo-Americans. Crocker indicated “that reports of atrocities in Matabeleland by the Fifth Brigade clearly were well-founded. This kind of action, conducted by North Korean trained units, would have an effect on Congress and US opinion generally.” Onslow reportedly told Crocker that “we share Crocker’s concern, but needed to act in a way which could help and not further complicate the situation.” Onslow recommend making their concern clear to the Zimbabwean authorities, but “to the avoidance of dramatic or highly publicised gestures.” The British noted that “the prospects of influencing the situation and maintaining Western interests in Zimbabwe” pointed to the need to maintain their assistance there. Lawrence Eagleburger, President Reagan’s undersecretary of state for political affairs, is reported to have “agreed that the need in Zimbabwe was to ‘stay with it.’”³² Onslow and Eagleburger met again on March 1, 1983, and they discussed “Zimbabwe Army excesses in Matabeleland.” The notes from the meeting indicate that “both sides agreed on the necessity to watch the ‘worrying’ situation very carefully and to keep in close touch in an effort, as Onslow put it, ‘to limit damage.’” Both Eagleburger and Onslow “concurred that the suspension or termination of aid to Mugabe would be unwise.”³³

Rationalizing *Gukurahundi*

It was impossible, really, for diplomats to paint the ex-ZIPRA dissidents in convenient Cold War terms. Even though Mugabe continued to tell the story of continued Soviet supplies of weapons to ZAPU and ZIPRA after the Lancaster House agreement and the elections, diplomats now dismissed this as nothing more than an idle threat, given that the Soviets had shown no indication that they would continue to support Nkomo and instead were trying their best to curry favor with Mugabe and ZANU. The more realistic supporter of ex-ZIPRA dissidents was South Africa in the form of weapons, ammunition, and some

³² Washington to FCO, “Your Telno 291: Zimbabwe,” February 19, item 18, DEFE 24/2801, BNA.

³³ “FCO Minister of State Cranley Onslow’s Call on Under Secretary Eagleburger,” March 1, 1983, Unclassified US Department of State, Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256578, Date: 09/24/2013, DoS FOIA Reading Room, <https://tinyurl.com/ydh8d4kp>.

training in South Africa. However, as damaging as “Super-ZAPU” may have been, they did not account for those ex-ZIPRA fighters who made up the small but destructive group of dissidents that had left the ZNA on their own or been demobilized from the ZNA and decided to fight the central government.³⁴ Richard Werbner, who did extensive ethnographical research in the areas affected by the *Gukurahundi*, suggests that this group’s motives were a “quasi-nationalism” reflecting the ways dissidents built a defense of primarily the SiNdebele-speaking communities of the southwestern parts of Zimbabwe, and also parts of the Midlands province. Significantly, Werbner makes the point that this quasi-nationalism, and “the polarization of two quasi-nations or super-tribes, the Shona against the Ndebele,” was the product of contemporary politics.³⁵ Werbner notes that the original goals of both liberation movements were to create a unified, nonracial nation state. However, “the recruiting of the armies on a regional basis was itself a process that people who came to be identified by language as Shona or Ndebele.”³⁶ Werbner makes a clear and important statement on what was happening in Zimbabwe: “The catastrophe of quasi-nationalism is that it can capture the might of the nation state and bring authorised violence down ruthlessly against the people who seem to stand in the way of the nation being united and pure as one body.”³⁷ The ability of these dissidents to operate in territories with distinct linguistic and historical differences from the majority chiShona speaking regions of Zimbabwe meant that, ultimately and rather conveniently, diplomats increasingly tended to accept the “tribal” or ethnic explanation for dissident violence presented by Mugabe and others in ZANU.

Rather than emphasizing the political challenges that support for ZAPU presented to Mugabe’s party – ZAPU’s ability to remain the electoral dominant party in these provinces – diplomats, and more importantly their superiors, tended to accept ZANU’s narrative that ZAPU as a party, and Nkomo as a leader, represented a “tribal” threat

³⁴ See Joseph Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours*, 1st ed. (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1986), 180–83.

³⁵ Richard Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of an African Family* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute 1991), 159.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. See also the firsthand accounts by those who were victims of the 5 Brigade. Ibid., 160–173.

to the nation state. It was this convenient ability of diplomats to privilege the ethnic explanation that helped them to rationalize the severity of state violence against civilians and ZAPU party members and politicians during the *Gukurahundi* period (1983–1987). This basic idea is fundamental for understanding how diplomats, who should have otherwise been expected to raise serious objections to the reports of violence against civilians, could carry on in 1983 and 1984 as if this violence was something acceptable, or normalized, in an African race state. As Stuart Doran argues, the British, American, Canadian, and Australian diplomats in Harare did not simply “accept” the violence as normalized, but eventually came around to create a collective sense of what could be viewed as “problematic but manageable” in terms of state violence against civilians.³⁸ I would add to this useful characterization that the diplomatic record also shows that not all foreign diplomats reached a common-sense level of what was manageable, and those that challenged this view found their concerns ignored by higher-level officials in their foreign relations bureaucracies. Those officials in Washington, DC and London tended to justify their overlooking of these civilian deaths and torture by emphasizing African race state themes, such as “tribalism” that, in their minds, such violence could be explained away by precolonial rivalries rather than connecting it to ongoing support for Mugabe and his military. Therefore, the rationalization of Zimbabwean state crimes owed much to a shift toward an African “race state” narrative and trope used by diplomats and foreign affairs bureaucracies reporting on events in Zimbabwe.

One key aspect of this shift is the evidence showing how foreign diplomats relied on white Zimbabweans as their main sources for gauging an acceptable level of state violence. In addition, the relatively small amount of poor treatment of whites in the areas where the 5 Brigade was deployed was also used to contrast accepted levels of African race state violence. A report from March 3, 1983, shows this sort of thinking at work. The BMATT officer reported on the question of whether or not 5 Brigade violence was the consequence of ill-trained soldiers acting beyond their orders, or soldiers following orders to

³⁸ Doran writes, “Articulated or not, most of these countries had made a decision that political violence would not produce a crisis point in bilateral relations unless marked by mass killings over a sustained period. Anything below this threshold would be regarded as problematic but manageable.” Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory* (Kindle edition, location 10831/20982).

unleash violence against civilians. In a subsection entitled, “5 BDE Modus operandi,” the officer explains a racialized logic: “There is now little doubt that the soldiers of 5 Bde have been operating in a controlled manner, carrying out Government policy in their savage treatment of dissidents, potential dissidents and local people who might or might not have given support to the dissidents.” The officer argues how, “[o]ne strong indicator to this has been the universally good behaviour in relation to the white people of Matabeleland. Had the killings and beatings been the result of ill discipline, then some whites would almost certainly have been subjected to at least abuse.”³⁹

British accounts of 5 Brigade action in February 1983 indicate clear orders to avoid engaging with white farmers. High Commissioner Byatt wrote that “Sekeramayi emphasised to me that all commanders had been told to ensure that the white community were treated courteously.” As reports of atrocities by the 5 Brigade came in Byatt emphasized that they were ordered not to interfere with whites. Byatt traveled over three days in early February to the Nyamandhlovu and Tjolutjo areas in the Matabeleland North province. He spoke with white farmers and their workers who reported that the operations in Tjolutjo had begun at the beginning of February and were “concentrated on 3 farm compounds where a number of men were beaten or killed.” Byatt reported that “[t]he general view amongst the whites and their work force that I spoke to was ‘they had some good int [intelligence] because they were the right places [sic].’” Adding to the point that the 5 Brigade were treating whites well, Byatt stated, “Generally the officers have been controlling their soldiers when searching commercial farmers compounds.”

Going a bit further, Byatt described some of the information he had heard about how the ZNA hoped to contain the killings of civilians. He related how there had been “excesses including killing and rape in the forest areas and in tribal lands” but that Sekeramayi “dispatched General Sheba Gava [Vitalis Zvinavashe] down to the operational area this week to grip commanders.” Byatt’s observation after his trip “was that 5 BDE units were under control and operating to a plan.” Once again, his test of this was white opinion: “The White community were being courteously treated, were happy that the dissidents had left

³⁹ “Zimbabwe Situation Report [SITREP] No. 80 - Period 4 Feb to 2 Mar.” March 3, 1983, item 20/2, DEFE 24/2801, BNA.

the area but were apprehensive about what would happen if the military withdrew.” Byatt reported that Sekeramayi told him the 5 Brigade would not be withdrawn, and that “if necessary barracks will be built for them.” Byatt related that in the Tjolotjo area, based on “various reliable reports ... about 30–34 people have been killed of which a number were dissident supporters or active sympathizers.”⁴⁰

In another report, Byatt related further evidence from Sekeramayi that the degree of violence was premeditated, down to the region. Sekeramayi had told Byatt on March 3 that “in Matabeleland South (around Gwanda) there has been a marked improvement in the overall situation.” Comparatively, “the real trouble had been in Matabeleland North, in Tsholotsho, Nyamandlovu, Nkayi and Lupane.” Sekeramayi told Byatt that Matabeleland North was “an area which had seen little fighting during the war and the population had romantic ideas about warfare and their ability to ‘deal with the government.’ It had been necessary to disabuse them.” The “Breaking the Silence” report would later indicate that 5 Brigade was deployed in Matabeleland North in late January 1983. “Within weeks, its troops had murdered more than two thousand civilians, beaten thousands more, and destroyed hundreds of homesteads.”⁴¹ Given that this meeting with Sekeramayi took place mid-February, reports of the atrocities were already being discussed.

Sekeramayi told Byatt that he recognized that “harsh action had not helped Zimbabwe’s name,” arguing similarly as he had to Onslow in early January. “But that, and the government’s position, would have suffered as much or more if the increasing dissidence of last year had been allowed to continue.” Sekeramayi added, “There had been a risk of a descent towards a Biafra-type situation.” Byatt then “reminded him that the Nigerian government had followed up the military phase with a massive unity drive.” Sekeramayi “accepted that parallel as valid.” Sekeramayi assured Byatt that “the ‘current phase’ would come to end this weekend. After that the army would be withdrawn but would be told to ‘stand still’ in its present positions.”⁴²

⁴⁰ From BMATT Zimbabwe to MODUK Army, “Operations in Matabeleland,” February 17, 1983, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

⁴¹ Ibid. Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence*, 14.

⁴² Harare to FCO, “Your Telno 347 to Washington,” March 4, 1983, PREM 19/1154, BNA.

High Commissioner Byatt addressed the question of the Zimbabwe government's role in orchestrating the *Gukurahundi*, and the impact it was having on the many ex-ZIPRA officers in the ZNA in mid-February 1983. He was of the opinion that "[t]he Government's firm policy is certainly having an initial success but much will depend on the future behaviour of soldiers and what sort of follow up action on the civil side is generated." He noted that within the ZNA, "senior ZIPRA officers . . . have personally had relatives killed by the army in the last few weeks." Such an observation may have suggested that the killings were much more widespread, and the number killed much higher in this first phase of *Gukurahundi*, than Byatt was reporting. Byatt did indicate that these senior ZIPRA officers "feel powerless to help and are further hindered by the obsessive secrecy that has now developed over all operations which are controlled directly by Nhongo and Gava bypassing both G Branch and Q Branch who are expected to tidy up the resulting nonsenses." Byatt noted that these officers "do not feel trusted and this hurts when they have made sacrifices to support [the] Government and its policy."⁴³

The problems for ex-ZIPRA in the ZNA were further exacerbated by Rex Nhongo's announcement that he planned to demobilize 7,000 ex-ZIPRA soldiers from the ZNA. Byatt stated that "the problems that would have created were very apparent to all except Nhongo."⁴⁴ The British and others put pressure on Nhongo to rethink such a plan, as it would have immediate impact on the dissident problem and could have potentially led to a rebellion of ex-ZIPRA in the military. Fortunately, after much pressure from ZNA officers and the British advisors, Nhongo walked back this announcement.

Major General Shortis, the leader of BMATT in Zimbabwe, met face to face with Mugabe on March 17, 1983. Shortis's account of the meeting shows he was careful and diplomatic when discussing 5 Brigade with Mugabe. His criticisms were organizational: "I then raised the question of 5 Brigade saying I was not going to talk about Matabeleland but about the importance of improving the command and control and logistic support of 5 Brigade which at present caused them difficulties." Shortis told Mugabe that 5 Brigade's "great asset to

⁴³ From BMATT Zimbabwe to MODUK Army, "Operations in Matabeleland," February 17, 1983, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

⁴⁴ Byatt BMATT Zimbabwe to MODUK Army, "ZNA Demobilisation Plan," February 11, 1983, DEFE 13/1740, BNA.

the Government was their loyalty but unless this was controlled and directed they could become a liability.” After a detailed recommendation on how command and control could be improved, Shortis described Mugabe’s response. According to Shortis, “Mugabe then said that they had no option but to take action in Matabeleland and the use of the 5th Brigade had been ‘a humanitarian action to prevent further suffering by the people from the actions of the bandits.’” Mugabe then said this had been “misinterpreted by the press and the world.” Shortis replied that he had “been down to the area and quite certainly there had been excesses and innocent people had been killed but also the white commercial farmers felt safer and have been correctly treated.” Mugabe blamed ZAPU for not helping to stop the violence and acknowledged that “he now had specific details of some civilians being killed and this would be investigated.”⁴⁵

Mugabe then gave Shortis his usual speech about “the intentions of ZAPU,” including his rendition of the “Zero Hour” plan from 1976. Mugabe also blamed ZAPU for being “tribal,” and for wanting “a government by the Ndebele of the Ndebele whereas his government was a government of Zimbabwe by Zimbabweans not of one tribe or another.”⁴⁶ Mugabe continued to push his argument that Nkomo and ZAPU were to blame, and that he was justified to act against Nkomo, ZAPU, and by extension, the Ndebele civilian population. To call what he did a “humanitarian action” shows how far Mugabe had convinced himself that he was justified in authorizing the 5 Brigade to act, no matter the cost in human lives and suffering. For Mugabe, this deployment of the military had become a continuation of the war.

A BMATT situation report in early February 1983 provided an account of what the British were hearing about the motivations for the deployment of the 5 Brigade. One such theory was attributed to the “former Deputy Commander of 1 Bde.” The theory suggested that “the Security Forces were being launched on a campaign of reprisals etc., aimed at forcing a civil war situation in Matabeleland, in which the Ndebele would be forced to break out weapons from cachés and muster their forces, thereby presenting a proper target for the ZNA.” The report went on: “It is too early to say whether this theory has substance,

⁴⁵ “Record of a Meeting between Mr. Mugabe and Major General Shortis on 17 March 1983,” DEFE 24/2864, BNA. Thanks to Allison Shutt for sharing a copy of this file.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

but the actions of 5 Bde have more the flavour of pure tribalism, with the Shonas taking it out on the Ndebele. The way in which they are apparently attacking the civilian population as ‘supporters’ or ‘potential supporters’ of the dissidents as much as the dissidents themselves, lends evidence to the latter theory.”⁴⁷ With hindsight, both theories are in some ways plausible explanations without necessarily relying on a “tribalism” causation. Similar to the analysis of many so-called “tribal” wars in postcolonial Africa, the prerequisite for such conflicts is an intelligentsia and leadership willing to mobilize political violence around ethnicity, most often to use state power against a minority group or rival.⁴⁸ That was the case in mobilizing 5 Brigade, but it must also be seen as a cynical political calculation by Mugabe and others in ZANU to try to destroy Nkomo and ZAPU and push for a one-party state.

US Cold War Considerations

Likely because he was in Harare and had heard more testimonies of the violence, Ambassador Keeley was adamant about the need to try to influence Mugabe to reverse course. On February 17, 1983, he wrote a memo to the State Department entitled, “Fifth Brigade Behavior in Matabeleland.” Keeley started by stating that he was not so concerned with figuring out how much Mugabe knew about the violence:

There can be little doubt that Mugabe went along with or actively supported this mailed fist policy, but the question remains whether he fully comprehended how the Fifth Brigade was going to behave toward innocent civilians. My guess is that he went along with a proposal to use the Fifth Brigade ‘to root out and kill or capture the dissidents.’

⁴⁷ “Zimbabwe Sitrep No 79. Period 7 Jan to 3 Feb 1983,” February 3, 1983, DEFE 24/2801, BNA.

⁴⁸ One of the clearest presentations of how intelligentsia and politicians mobilize ethnic violence in postcolonial Africa is in Bill Berkeley, *The Graves are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa* (New York: Basic Books 2002). See also Preben Kaarsholm, *Violence, Political Culture, and Development in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey 2006); and, more recently, Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020) and Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

Keeley argues that the Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation had presented Mugabe options for responding in January, which “generally recommended a political settlement coupled with increased military/security presence in Matabeleland.” However, Keeley said that it had “advised against undertaking military operations because they would be counterproductive.” Keeley says it wasn’t known what recommendations the military had made, but that “around mid-January” they started to hear about “‘Operation Samaritan,’ which is what has been happening.” Keeley then wrote, “A great deal of damage has already been done. We cannot restore the dead and wounded nor reverse the profound alienation of the Ndebele people that has already transpired. What can be aimed for is a cessation of this disastrous policy.” Keeley went on to report that Garfield Todd had presented “a thick packet of testimony to Muzenda, Munagagwa [sic], and Sekeramayi,” and that he knew that one or more of them had passed it on immediately to Mugabe. “Now he has no excuse not to act.”⁴⁹ Judith Todd explained how Henry Karlen, the Catholic Bishop of Matabeleland, worked to make sure the reports of atrocities against civilians reached the highest ZANU leaders. Judith Todd and others also made sure that ZANU leaders received these reports.⁵⁰

Keeley, in his own reporting, discussed why it was difficult to say what the United States should do at this stage to help reverse Zimbabwean government policy. He said that this situation was not just an issue of a bad policy choice, but “the very fundamental issue of relations between the two parties, between the Ndebele and the Shona (a struggle for dominance dating back a century and a half).” Here Keeley begins to put forward the ethnic causation argument, although

⁴⁹ Ambassador Harare to SecState WashDC, “Fifth Brigade behavior in Matabeleland,” State 061177, March 5, 1983 (contains text of Ambassador Keeley’s reply to Crocker dated February 17, 1983), UNCLASSIFIED US Department of State, Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256616, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/ybul89vm>.

⁵⁰ Todd, *Through the Darkness*, 49–55; for the campaign to pressure government by Catholics and others, see Diana Auret, *Reaching for Justice: The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Looks Back at the Past Twenty Years, 1972–1992* (Harare: Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1992); and Michael Auret, *From Liberator to Dictator: An Insider’s Account of Robert Mugabe’s Descent into Tyranny* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2009); and Timothy Scarnecchia, “Catholic Voices of the Voiceless: The Politics of Reporting Rhodesian and Zimbabwean State Violence in the 1970s and the Early 1980s,” *Acta Academica* 47, no. 1 (2015), 182–207.

he immediately brings it back to the political causation of removing Nkomo and ZAPU, and “in fact the very outcome that everyone involved in the negotiations for a Rhodesian settlement most feared: a post-independence civil war between the two wings of the Patriotic Front liberation movement.” Keeley also offered his perspective on Nkomo and ZAPU’s position. He said that the “Ndebele/ZAPU side are convinced, from Nkomo on down, that the elections were fraudulent and that they were denied their share of power, despite their major contribution to the successfully concluded liberation struggle.” Keeley gave his interpretation of what he saw in the motivations of ZAPU, saying they were “determined to resist Shona domination and Nkomo and his supporters, at least, demand a fifty-fifty power sharing arrangement at a minimum (though they probably secretly believe they should be running the show).” At the same time, Keeley reported that “ZAPU denies it has any responsibility for the dissidents.” In terms of future US/Zimbabwe relations, Keeley recommended against the use of US leverage to try to resolve the issue, as he believed ZANU would respond defensively, arguing their military operations were done to make it possible for future development. He ended his report stating how difficult it had become to talk with Mugabe, who had become “unapproachable”: “it has only been with the greatest expenditure of energy and ingenuity that we have been able to get people he ought to see in to see him recently. He is reluctant to receive advice, especially when he can guess in advance what it’s likely to be.”⁵¹

The State Department itself was, at first, clear about the desired US position. Kenneth Dam, the deputy secretary of state in the Reagan administration, wrote instructions to southern African ambassadors on March 4, 1983. In his instructions, Dam noted that ZANU leaders wanted to put the blame for the violence on the South Africans, which the United States did not believe was wholly accurate. Dam also noted that evidence pointed to Mugabe approving the tactics used “to allow the fifth [brigade] to smoke out the dissidents,” but also mentions that Mugabe may not be fully aware of “the methods the unit is employing and is therefore unaware of the ramifications of his decision.” Dam noted the difficulty in getting through to Mugabe, and how his

⁵¹ Ambassador Harare to SecStateDC, “Fifth Brigade behavior in Matabeleland,” State 061177, February 17, 1983, UNCLASSIFIED US Department of State, Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256616, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/ybsnphee>.

“testiness when confronted on GOZ misbehavior,” would make it “difficult to get him to move to reverse the present disastrous course in Matabeleland.” Dam strongly concluded, “We are compelled nevertheless to try.”⁵²

In the next few weeks, Keeley put his energy into attempting to ensure that Mugabe was aware of the negative press he and his government were receiving in the United States. He sent a packet of news clippings to Bernard Chidzero, the finance minister, asking him to try to speak with Mugabe about 5 Brigade atrocities. It would later turn out that Chidzero would sit next to Mugabe as they flew to India together. Keeley met Chidzero at the sending-off ceremony in Harare, and Chidzero asked Keeley if he could share the articles with Mugabe. Keeley was pleased to report back to the State Department that his strategy had worked.⁵³ Underlying the US strategy was a larger pre-occupation that continuation of state violence against civilians would undermine the ambitious southern African policy of Chester Crocker, the assistant secretary of state. The larger American interest evolved to focus on keeping Zimbabwe as a model of racial reconciliation and an ally of the West.

The following day, February 18, 1983, Keeley was to report out the coverage of a speech by Mugabe. *The Herald* newspaper covered the speech, with the headline “Bandits Will Be Crushed Says Mugabe.” Mugabe told the audience in Chipinge’s Gaza stadium, “ZANU(PF) won the country through the barrel of the gun and it will use the gun to destroy dissidents and safeguard the country’s independence.” Mugabe added, according to the reporter’s summary, that “5 Brigade (Gukurahundi) would not leave Matabeleland until every dissident had been routed.” Mugabe explained that the “dissidents were fighting a tribal war to put Cde [Comrade] Nkomo into power but this would never happen in Zimbabwe.” Mugabe asked the crowd rhetorically, “Who do they think they are? Who does Nkomo think he is? In Zimbabwe there is no important person expect the povo [poor].”

⁵² Fm SecState WashDC to AmEmbassy Dar es Salaam, Maputo, Harare, “GOZ Decision to send Fifth Brigade into Matabeleland,” March 4, 1983, Unclassified US Department of State, Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256608, Date: 09/24/2013 <https://tinyurl.com/ybsnphee>.

⁵³ American Embassy Harare to SecState Washington, DC, “Zimbabwe: Matabeleland Developments,” Harare 1572, Unclassified US Department of State, Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256606, Date: 09/24/2013 <https://tinyurl.com/yxk372qa>.

Mugabe added, “The povo elected us and we will rule by the povo’s wishes.”⁵⁴

Chester Crocker wrote to Secretary of State George Shultz on March 4, 1983, to outline US policy goals for Zimbabwe. After agreeing with Minister Onslow that the United States and Britain should support Mugabe by avoiding public criticisms of him and his government over reports of military brutality and killings of Zimbabwean citizens, Crocker wrote a detailed analysis of the Zimbabwean internal situation for Shultz. Crocker’s summary confirms that he and others were now viewing Zimbabwe as an “African race state,” and felt it was the responsibility of the United States to use their leverage to keep Mugabe’s conflict with Nkomo and the Ndebele from influencing Cold War politics. Part of this strategy involved keeping whites in Zimbabwe. Crocker began his historical background by stating that “like African leaders since the wave of Independence began in 1957, he [Mugabe] wants to consolidate his power. In practice this means the suppression of the rival, minority Ndebele tribe by the Shona, who triumphed through Mugabe’s ZANU party in the 1980 independence elections.” Crocker added, “This comes against a background of centuries of tribal rivalry, characterized in the past as well by violence.” Crocker coupled this “African state” trope with Mugabe’s “need . . . to maintain a climate of law and order in Zimbabwe that encourages the still economically necessary white minority to stay.” Here Crocker invoked a common contrast in this trope, the perceived tensions between a “tribal” versus “modern” state.

Crocker suggested to Shultz that Mugabe’s gamble may likely result in even greater violence. “From Mugabe’s perspective, the key question is whether turning the Fifth Brigade loose on the Ndebele will succeed in crushing dissidence and restoring law and order, or whether, in fact, it will drive the Ndebeles – *a warrior people historically*, into an even more violent, organized and disruptive alienation.” Crocker said although it was still not clear what would happen, they suspected that “the latter will be the result, with various serious consequences for Zimbabwe’s own future prospects.” Such thinking ignored the political reality of the moment: that ZAPU and ex-ZIPRA soldiers

⁵⁴ American Embassy Harare to SecState WashDC, “Mugabe on Dissidents,” Harare01194, Unclassified US Department of State, Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256569, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/yycjnyb>.

were in no position to organize and mount an effective counter offensive against the Zimbabwean government and the ZNA.

Crocker clarified his argument to get at his real preoccupation that “ironically, this course could play right into the hands of Mugabe’s least favored foreigners – the Soviets and the South Africans.” At this point, Crocker argued that there were two different positions among South Africans. First, there was the position of those who stand to benefit from a stable and economically successful Zimbabwe, “as a multiracial society would have fed a hope that there is a viable alternative to racial separation as the basis for society.” He went on to outline the other position: “That was exactly what some other white South Africans were worried about; for them, it was a good thing that it be seen that blacks were not able to run a multiracial nation successfully.” Crocker argued that South Africa had therefore “played a game of economic cat-and-mouse with Zimbabwe and provided clandestine military assistance to the ZAPU dissidents and other opponents of Mugabe’s government, fanning the already existing sparks of Ndebele and white resentment of the ZANU/Shona triumph in the elections.”⁵⁵

Crocker’s main concern revolved around avoiding the evidence of Zimbabwean government’s state crimes interfering with his plans for southern Africa. His main worry was that two strongly opposed groups in the United States could both argue for a reduction in US foreign aid to Zimbabwe. Crocker understood that the “Human Rights constituency sees the Fifth Brigade’s actions as the US associated with yet another brutal government.” He also identified in the United States, “the people who wanted Ian Smith to rule forever in Rhodesia,” who would wish to “see cutting off aid to Zimbabwe despite the fact that one reason for Mugabe’s action is to preserve a stable climate for whites in Zimbabwe.” For Crocker, the risk was that both groups could do harm by “zeroing in on aid and possible Peace Corps programs in Zimbabwe, . . . thus stripping us of the tools to influence Zimbabwe and to continue to build good relations.”⁵⁶ It was, therefore, the threat

⁵⁵ To the Secretary from AF- Chester A Crocker, “Information Memorandum: A Strategy to Deal with the Zimbabwe Problem,” March 4, 1983, FOIA Virtual Reading Room, US Department of State, Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256585, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/ycu6ngb2>. Italics added by author.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of future American domestic pressure caused by the coverage of the violence that was the most damaging to Crocker's wider southern African Cold War strategy.

Keeley and Crocker had an illuminating exchange on March 11, 1983, after receiving the news of the attack on Nkomo's home in Bulawayo and Nkomo's subsequent exit from Zimbabwe to Botswana. Crocker replied to Keeley's account of the recent events with a clear understanding that these events were a political crackdown that was "discouraging prospects for return to stability and reconciliation." Crocker summarized the situation as a political debacle: the Zimbabwean government's "readiness to use brutal force, distortions, smear tactics, and scapegoating to destroy ZAPU, eliminate Nkomo politically, and intimidate the Ndebele under cover of anti-dissident operations are all disheartening."⁵⁷ Having outlined the serious political issues facing Zimbabwe, Crocker then instructed Keeley that they "must keep in mind several broader issues and themes that are central in Washington thinking." These included his belief that it was "logical and historical" that Britain should take the lead. Another theme was the issue of the US assistance program to Zimbabwe, and how it would come under pressure from the media, the public, and "Congressional criticism."⁵⁸

Crocker's third point was the most significant in terms of Cold War perceptions of Zimbabwe. Crocker wrote that "it is clear beyond question that GOZ 'strategy' plays directly into Soviet and certainly SAG [South African government] hands." The rest of the memo to Keeley indicated that new signs of Mugabe trying to "at least explore more 'normal' relations with Moscow" were "troubling in several respects." Crocker said that such a decision suggested "basic lack of realism about Zimbabwe's margin of maneuver." Crocker then suggested two possible rationales for this move: one might be "to smoke out definitively Soviet intentions toward ZAPU," the other to "reflect a view that Harare will need eastern support to do things that western friends might shrink from."⁵⁹ In Crocker's Cold War logic, it was thus

⁵⁷ S Harare 1726 sent FM SecState WashDC to AmEmbassy London for AF Assistant Secretary Crocker from Keeley, "Nkomo," March, 1983, Unclassified US Department of State, Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256614, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y89bb9b9>.

⁵⁸ Ibid. ⁵⁹ Ibid.

better to not criticize Mugabe, should that criticism push him closer to the Soviets.

Keeley replied to Crocker's instructions the same day, and his reply included his own criticisms of the standard US line of following Britain's lead in this situation. At first Keeley agreed with the idea that Britain should take the lead. He then quickly goes "off the record" to say, "We don't entirely share the FCO's confidence about how much of a lead their representatives here are willing and eager to take." He asks Crocker parenthetically "to protect our relations with our British colleagues, with whom we have always worked closely," but then provides a fairly stark and critical impression of his British counterparts, starting with High Commissioner Byatt. "The UK High Commission has always, since Independence, cared more about the UK's bilateral relations with the GOZ and has not been inclined to participate in demarchés that might cause them damage." Keeley stated that Byatt is scheduled to leave Harare "after nearly a three-year tour and a decade of involvement with the Rhodesian problem." He suggested, therefore, that Byatt "doesn't want to go out on a low note. That is, a GOZ-UK confrontation over the GOZ's strategy for Nkomo, ZAPU, and the Ndebele and Matabeleland." Keeley also had some off the record criticisms of General Shortis of BMATT, with whom he had spoken with "ten days ago, before he'd received his instructions on what to say about Matabeleland." Keeley said that he found him "excessively defensive about what has been going on in Matabeleland," and that he was "almost an apologist for the GOZ." However, Keeley then stepped back from overtly criticizing General Shortis, noting his obvious "vested interest in the success of BMATT's armed forces integration exercise," and stating that Shortis "tends to downplay the dangers of a blow-up which would scuttle that long and arduous effort." In the end, Keeley rationalized Shortis's blinders because, "[b]y all accounts it has been successful to the degree BMATT could make it so, in the face of a long-standing political and tribal conflict BMATT were powerless to affect." By referencing the "tribal conflict," Keeley was expressing the standard response in which "tribalism" was used to distance Western interests from any responsibility or culpability over the behavior of the Zimbabwean military and intelligence organizations, even when these same interests were supplying funding and training to these institutions.

Keeley then turned back "on the record" in his telegram to Crocker: stating, "We are as perplexed as you about Mugabe's role in the whole

affair.” Keeley stated that he “gets the sense that he has allowed others to ‘do the necessary,’ that is, whatever they think is necessary to bring the dissident problem under control, while wishing to keep his hands clean as far as possible, so that it doesn’t appear he has abandoned his much-admired policy of national reconciliation.” Keeley repeated a phrase that was often used by Western diplomats since Mugabe returned to the scene in 1975: “To some extent he has become a captive of events beyond his control. He has to maintain control over the faction-ridden and fractious ZANU party, which requires that he bend to the wishes and impulses of his more militant colleagues when the pressure from that quarter becomes too great.”⁶⁰ Keeley added, “I am not trying to apologize for his recent behavior but rather to understand and explain it.” He thought that Nkomo leaving Zimbabwe had “in a way ... lifted a great burden from his [Mugabe’s] shoulders.” Keeley went on, “He has not liked or trusted Nkomo for the past twenty years and could no longer work with him. There are others in ZAPU he can work with.” Keeley would learn more about the state crimes committed against citizens during the *Gukurahundi* and become more critical and also supportive of more critical voices in Zimbabwe.

On March 25, 1983, the CIA presented a “Warning Report: Sub-Saharan Africa” based on feedback from Vice President Bush’s trip to Africa in November 1982. The report outlined the trouble spots in Africa for Cold War conflicts, which included Zimbabwe. The report warned that the officials accompanying Bush had heard of “considerable concern ... over the potentially serious internal security problems that are developing in the wake of the government’s often heavy-handed military efforts to suppress dissidence in Matabeleland, the base of opposition leader Joshua Nkomo’s popular support.” It suggested that “most analysts feared that there would be a continued and perhaps rising level of violence there in the next few months – possibly involving white civilians – even though the government’s military operations appear to be winding down.”⁶¹

An additional CIA report, dated March 23, 1983, argued that the crackdown on ZAPU had led Mugabe to become “substantially more

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Acting National Intelligence Officer for Africa, “Warning Report: Sub-Saharan Africa,” NIC #2209–83/1, March 25, 1983, CIA-RDP91B00776R000100010030-7, Approved for Release 2008/11/14.



Figure 10 Map of Zimbabwe. CIA, “Zimbabwe: ZANU-ZAPU Rivalry and Intelligence Assessment,” April 1983.

strident” in his rhetoric, “blaming his problems on South Africa and its alleged Western backers.” The report noted that Mugabe “clearly resents the criticism of the Western press has made of his handling of Ndebele dissidence, and he has accused US and other Western media of following a double standard in the coverage of violence in Matabeleland.” The report suggested that this “deepening cycle of repression and violence in Zimbabwe already has undermined an important Western goal: the creation of a moderate, democratic, multi-racial society in Zimbabwe to serve as an example for South Africa.” The intelligence report did not see a threat from any possible Soviet and South African role in the conflict. That was first because the CIA saw the Soviets as courting Mugabe, even providing the Zimbabwean government with the first Soviet weapon shipments in March 1983. Secondly, the CIA doubted South Africa would intervene in Zimbabwe as they were in Angola or Mozambique, “in part because ZAPU’s tribal base is too small – the Ndebele are about 16 percent of the population – and geographically localized to support a viable

insurgency.”⁶² A few weeks later, on April 5, 1983, the CIA issued a special analysis entitled, “Zimbabwe: More Instability Ahead,” where the same points were made as to why there was little chance of a ZAPU insurgency, and little incentive for South Africa to become more involved. But the “Outlook” section reiterated the concerns about what the repression in Matabeleland meant for relations between the Zimbabwean government and whites. “Mugabe’s abandonment of a moderate course toward the Ndebele may encourage ZANU hardliners to push for more radical approaches toward the whites or the economy. Such moves could destroy Zimbabwe’s reasonably successful economic and political relations with the West.” The report concluded that “if the cycle of dissident terrorism and government repression continues, relations probably will deteriorate further. As a result, Western governments will find it harder to justify their aid programs to Zimbabwe.”⁶³ This latter point reiterated Crocker’s big worry as well, that the violence jeopardized US aid programs to Zimbabwe, without which it was difficult to keep Mugabe part of the Western alliance to assist with Namibia and Crocker’s plans for southern Africa.

British Responses to Initial *Gukurahundi* Reports

For all of Ambassador Keeley’s criticism of Byatt, there is archival evidence that Byatt did provide his government a more critical assessment of Mugabe and the 5 Brigade violence. For example, in a confidential “Short Assessment of the Situation and Prospects in Zimbabwe,” dated April 7, 1983, Byatt wrote that while “[s]tatesman-like in many of his policies, Mugabe has made repeated mistakes over ZAPU and the Matabele.” Byatt stated that Mugabe “overestimates both the threat they pose and the efficacy of his own weapons (army, police, etc) in confronting it.” He argued that “it is almost impossible to deal with a guerrilla/terrorist situation of this kind by military means alone, not backed by a careful political and intelligence effort.”⁶⁴ Here

⁶² CIA Director of Intelligence, “Zimbabwe: The ZANU-ZAPU Rivalry: an Intelligence Assessment, March 23, 1983, CIA-RDP84S00552R000200030002-4, Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/07/05.

⁶³ CIA Special Analysis, “Zimbabwe: More Instability Ahead,” April 5, 1983, CIA-RDP85T01094R000200010065-3, Approved for Release 2008/06/10.

⁶⁴ Byatt to Secretary of State [Onslow], “Zimbabwe,” April 7, 1983, E28 DEFE 24/2788, BNA.

though, he puts much of the blame for civilian deaths on the 5 Brigade: "General Shortis tells me that the Brigade's operational command is a shambles. That may explain why much of the killing of civilians happened." He also thought this may explain why dissidents were able to kill white farmers in areas the 5 Brigade was deployed. Byatt noted, "The farmers are an attractive target because they draw international attention and maximise embarrassment to the government."⁶⁵ Most importantly, Byatt claimed that the "dissidents do not pose a threat to the existence of Mugabe's government. Nor do the conditions exist for a regular civil war." He then made an important point: "But the behaviour of the Fifth Brigade in January and February has left a deep scar." He compared the situation to Ulster in Northern Ireland, as "although the Matabele minority mostly dislike what the 'boys in the bush' are doing, they condone it because they share the frustrations which provoke it." Byatt stated that unless there were to be outside support from the South Africans or the Soviets, "Mugabe's forces will be able to contain the dissidence but not eradicate it."⁶⁶

One interesting note in Byatt's report was his observation that white farmers in Matabeleland would likely leave the country. The white farmers "will go But their numbers are small. It is a marginal area for farming." He related that white farmers elsewhere in the country "draw such comfort from the fact that ours [Britain] is seen as the dominant external influence on Mugabe's government, and from the presence of our military training team." Byatt essentially concluded that the Zimbabwean government was facing a "very difficult security problem on their hands (albeit partly of their own making)."⁶⁷ This sort of write-off of an entire region of the country, given the positive relations between the British and white farmers elsewhere in Zimbabwe, also indicates a race state view of the situation. On a wider scale, the British were also writing off the Ndebele civilians that suffered under the state-sponsored violence of the 5 Brigade. Although not articulated, Byatt's support for Mugabe made clear that these Zimbabweans were unfortunate victims, but not important enough to press Mugabe too hard regarding their treatment. As Ambassador Keeley had noted about Byatt as he left his high commissioner position, he was not going to protest to Mugabe on the issue of state crimes, and he could still continue to downplay the number of

⁶⁵ Ibid. ⁶⁶ Ibid. ⁶⁷ Ibid.

victims in March 1983. He believed it was better to maintain the close relations between Britain and Zimbabwe built up over the first three years of Zimbabwe's existence than publicly criticize Britain's man in Zimbabwe.

Thatcher and Mugabe Meet in New Delhi

On November 24, 1983, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher met with Mugabe and Mnangagwa in New Delhi. While summarizing the political climate in his country, Mugabe provided Thatcher his own version of the first three years of independence, noting that 1980 and 1981 had been largely successful in terms of his reconciliation policies. He then noted that Ian Smith was "bitter that the cause for which he had fought was lost. Others had similar feelings." This statement was followed by a long description of Joshua Nkomo, who Mugabe described as "very bitter." Mugabe explained that Nkomo had wanted to "enter a pact with Mr. Mugabe's party for electoral purposes" after the Lancaster House Conference had ended. "But Zanu had wanted the leadership question to be settled and believed that it was for the people to choose their leader." Mugabe claimed that his party "had pledged themselves to coalition with Zapu whether they won or lost." But, he argued, ZAPU "had broken ranks" by seeking out "an alliance with Muzorewa and even with Ian Smith." After stating that Nkomo "wanted to be leader and wanted his party to have a Parliamentary majority," and that his "bitterness continued to simmer," he made the claim that ZAPU received weapons from the Soviet Union "after the elections," including "56 Sam 7 missiles," and that these weapons "had now come into the possession of the Zimbabwe Government."⁶⁸ Earlier Mugabe had claimed that ZIPRA moved weapons into the country after Lancaster House, and now he was claiming they had done so after the 1980 elections. Similar to the way Mugabe appealed to Governor Soames after the elections, he was clear to indicate to Thatcher that he and his ruling party were able to block any potential links between Nkomo and the Soviet Union.

⁶⁸ Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, 24 November 1983 at the British High Commissioner's Residence in New Delhi," item 2, PREM 19/2004, BNA.

President Mugabe then told Thatcher about ZAPU's "zero hour" strategy," which Mugabe linked back to 1976 and 1977, when "[t]hey [ZAPU] had decided to leave the fighting to Zanu in the expectation that the latter would become exhausted and would not in the end be able to resist Zapu." Mugabe claimed that once this moment was reached, "[t]hen Zapu would have moved in with an army well equipped with Soviet weapons." Mugabe explained that ZAPU went against orders and did not turn in many of these weapons, caching them instead, as "[t]hey had acquired over 25 large farms for storing these weapons and also for retraining cadres." Mugabe claimed that ZAPU "deliberately . . . had not integrated their crack forces." He then confided to Thatcher that "his confidence in Nkomo was immediately dashed" once the arms caches were found. He then described the removal of Nkomo, and two other ZAPU ministers from the Cabinet, but was quick to point out that he kept some ZAPU Cabinet members. Mugabe concluded, "The situation was now under control but pockets existed e.g. isolated farms where people felt unsafe."⁶⁹

Mugabe also discussed the continued detention of three of the seven white Air Force officers, who were detained after the Zimbabwean courts had dismissed their cases due to evidence of torture. Mugabe mentioned the loss of \$36 million in weapons destroyed at the Inkomo barracks outside of Harare in August 1981. He believed that South Africa was responsible for blowing up the arms depot and claimed that it had been the work of a South African agent working in the ZNA. The agent had confessed, but according to Mugabe, he was released by a policeman with "an Afrikaans name."⁷⁰ Mugabe told Thatcher this story to further his argument that the media and politicians in Britain and United States were unfairly critical of the continued detention of the accused Air Force officers involved in the sabotage of Thornhill. Mugabe claimed that "orchestration was apparent" in the United States, Britain, the British press, and the Conservative Party's accusations that he was "infringing human rights."

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Others estimate the value of the weapons destroyed at Inkomo Barracks to be worth Z\$50 million. See John Dzimba, *South Africa's Destabilization of Zimbabwe, 1980–89* (London: Macmillan 1998), 55. The destruction of these former ZANLA weapons was another indicator of South Africa's ability to carry out attacks in Zimbabwe.

Thatcher interjected on this point: “there was no orchestration – look at what the press said about her.” She told Mugabe that he “was entitled to complain,” and went on: “We know about preventive detention from our experience in Northern Ireland where many British soldiers had lost their lives.” She did, however, relate that the “allegations of torture” were what had “really provoked criticism in Britain,” adding, “of which she thought Mr. Mugabe had no knowledge.” In reply, Mugabe stated “that no government would ever instruct that torture be used. But security people had their methods.” Mugabe added how “Mr Mnungagwa [sic] was deaf in one ear as a result of torture. Other members of the present Cabinet had suffered similarly.” He further qualified that torture was not carried out on government orders, and that the three remaining white officers in detention would not be harmed and would be released soon.⁷¹ When two of the Air Force personnel were freed, they were debriefed in Britain where one of them “wished to make clear that they had discovered from other prisoners in jail that torture was widespread in Zimbabwe. Victims were both white and black, but especially Ndebele.” The released airman said, “Torture appeared to be applied to anyone who obstructed the authorities.”⁷²

Mugabe concluded his talk with Thatcher with a criticism of both whites in Zimbabwe and the disapproval of his government by whites in Britain. “Did these critics recognize the good that he had tried to do? Did the good vanish because of one or two isolated acts?” He then related how the majority of whites in Zimbabwe were content. “They still had their privileges, except the privilege of ruling.” He noted that they still “had a far higher standard of living and occupied prominent posts. Firms had not been nationalised and had even been encouraged to expand.” Thatcher told Mugabe that she faced many questions about Zimbabwe in the House of Commons, and that she “had been asked to cut off all aid to Zimbabwe.” She said that she would not do so as this “would not be conducive to helping those whom we wished to help.” At one point, Thatcher interjected that “it was true that critics did not take into account the fact that Mr. Mugabe and his people had suffered and had experienced preventive detention.” Mugabe replied

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Record of a Call on Mr Rifkind . . . Thursday 15 September 1983,” PREM 19/1154, BNA. For a discussion of the use of torture by the Zimbabwean state in the early 1980s, see Karekwaivanane, *Struggle Over State Power*, 199–207.

that he “would never claim that the fact that he had been detained entitled him to detain others. But did people in Britain really expect the situation in Zimbabwe would have been normalised so soon?” Mugabe added, rhetorically, as if he had read CIA director Casey’s book, “What was the state of America four years after independence?”⁷³

While Thatcher was still keeping up the appearance of collegiality with Mugabe in late 1983, the growing distance between the Anglo-American diplomats in Harare and Mugabe was best articulated in the annual review prepared by High Commissioner Martin Ewans for 1983, the first year of Ewans’s tenure in Harare. Ewans was an experienced member of the Foreign Service, having previously served in Karachi, Ottawa, Lagos, Kabul, Dar es Salaam, and New Delhi, before arriving as high commissioner in Harare. Ewans’s review of 1983 was so critical of Mugabe that Tessa Solesby of the FCO’s Rhodesia Department tried to play down some of his criticisms, stating in her cover letter to the report that Ewans “may paint some of the shadows rather too black, for example in his description of Mugabe who, for all his weaknesses, still has a strong strain of pragmatism and realism and remains (as the South Africans seem to accept) the best leaders available from our point of view.”⁷⁴ Ewans’s opening lines for his review demonstrated his disdain for what had transpired, and his penchant to frame events in a race state framework, where Mugabe and his ruling party are assessed in comparison with “black Africa.” Ewans started his report stating: “Not to put too fine a point on it, Zimbabwe has had a rotten year, even worse than 1982, which I see that my predecessor [Byatt] described as ‘bad.’” Ewans noted that a “crippling drought and world recession” were partly to blame, but noted that there had been “no lack of self-inflicted wounds” as well. “*The country has by no means sunk to the depths of incompetence and dissolution which are a feature of so much of the rest of black Africa.* But she has finished the year in markedly worse shape than when it began.”⁷⁵

⁷³ “Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, 24 November 1983 at the British High Commissioner’s Residence in New Delhi,” item 2, PREM 19/2004, BNA.

⁷⁴ Solesby does say, however, that “nevertheless Mr Ewans’s impressions of having a “rotten” year behind him will be shared by many of us at this end.” T. A. H. Solesby Central African Department to Mr. Squire, “Zimbabwe: Annual Review 1983,” January 26, 1984, item 6, FCO36/1929, BNA.

⁷⁵ High Commissioner Ewans, “Annual Report, 1983.” January 3, 1984, item 6, FCO36/1929, BNA. Italics added by author.

Ewans placed the blame for this squarely on Mugabe's autocratic obsession with defeating Nkomo and ZAPU. "The root of much of the trouble has lain in the combination of arrogance and arbitrariness which has characterised Mugabe's increasingly autocratic style of leadership." Here Ewans again compared Mugabe to other leaders in black Africa. "As so often in Africa too much has come to depend on the instincts, good or bad, of one man, and Mugabe's instincts, when allied to inexperience and isolation, have simply been too wrong too often."⁷⁶ Ewans specifically placed the *Gukurahundi* on Mugabe's shoulders. "Early in the year he was faced with growing armed dissidence in Matabeleland, caused largely by his own ineptitude the previous year in precipitating an unnecessary showdown with Joshua Nkomo's largely Matabeleland-based ZAPU." Ewans then criticized Mugabe's use of the 5 Brigade: "His response was to send in the 5th Brigade, a cowardly and ill-disciplined Shona unit 'trained' by the North Koreans." High Commissioner Ewans, unlike other British diplomats that may have been less willing to put the blame on Mugabe, continued to describe the disastrous outcome of this use of the 5 Brigade by Mugabe: "Instead of engaging the dissidents, they tried to re-establish governmental authority through a campaign of murderous intimidation of local villagers." He did, however, suggest that the 5 Brigade had been brought into line by the beginning of 1984: "The error was admitted and the 5th Brigade brought to heel more quickly than some outside observers have been prepared to concede, but not before hundreds, or, if some accounts are to be believed, thousands, had lost their lives."⁷⁷

1984

There is not sufficient space here to cover diplomacy in 1984 in detail, nor space to cover the remaining years of violence before the 1987 Unity Accords brokered between Mugabe and Nkomo.⁷⁸ Therefore, I will close out this chapter by presenting some evidence from the British and American archives to demonstrate that state violence and crimes did not end with the initial retreat and retraining of the 5

⁷⁶ Ibid. ⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory*, for in-depth coverage of the remaining years of the *Gukurahundi* period before the Unity Accords, from the perspectives of Commonwealth and South African diplomats.

Brigade in 1983. However, the Anglo-American diplomats, while not actually making use of any serious political leverage to protest the violence, tended to compare subsequent years of violence to 1983, and rationalized that since in their eyes it was not getting worse, there was little more that could be done. In many ways, there was a tendency to accept the claims that the South Africans were trying to use the dissidents to attack Mugabe and his government, and therefore the violence against dissidents, and the civilians who allegedly supplied them, was somehow justified. All the while, Britain's BMATT program was still operational, so there still remained the concern that they could be held accountable for crimes committed by the ZNA, including the 5 Brigade.

The notes from a meeting in London on November 14, 1983 between the FCO's Zimbabwe experts and BMATT Commander, Brigadier Edward Jones, indicated that both groups believed "that the current political climate was more receptive to a continuing role for BMATT and less inclined to believe that cessation of aid was imminent." The topic turned to the 5 Brigade, where "certain reservations were expressed about future behaviour of 5th Brigade in Matabeleland," which would suggest that there was intelligence that they were still operating there. "It was understood that the ZNA felt that they had made a mistake in requesting Korean training assistance and were now actively seeking ways to retrain both 5th Brigade and the Presidential Guard along British military lines." The minutes noted that "[i]t was emphasised that BMATT would not be involved in this retraining apart from the occasional officer coming through on normal courses."⁷⁹

By May 1984, journalists were reporting that BMATT was involved in the retraining of the 5 Brigade. Brigadier Edward Jones of BMATT wrote to London to complain about these stories and denied any BMATT role in retraining 5 Brigade soldiers. He did note, however, that BMATT took in five Brigade officers for training, amounting to eight officers since August 1983. He went on to give his assessment of the 5 Brigade: "For the future there may be some cause to be very cautiously optimistic – though I would not like to be held to this." He said "Brigadier Shiri (Commander 5 Brigade) is currently attending the

⁷⁹ "Minutes of a Meeting to Consider Policy Regarding Future of BMATT Zimbabwe Held on Monday 14 November 1983," item 11/1, DEFE 24/2865, BNA.

Staff College. He has been heard to be openly critical of the training his Brigade received from the [North] Koreans.” Still talking of Shiri and the 5 Brigade, Brigadier Jones added, “On the other side of the coin his Brigade is seen to be ‘politically reliable’ and very experienced. They have been undoubtedly deployed operationally far too long and are physically and mentally exhausted (they are not the only people in this boat).” Jones ended his letter, “I am very aware of the sensitivities surrounding 5 Brigade and will do nothing to tarnish BMATT’s position by unnecessary association with them.”⁸⁰

In January 1984, US ambassador Keeley reported to the State Department, based on a front-page *Sunday Mail* story, that Minister Nathan Shamuyarira had, in a speech given in London, described that there was now a new, “second phase of terrorism” in Zimbabwe. Shamuyarira said that South Africa and their “Super-ZAPU” were now mostly responsible for dissident violence and for the killing of whites. Most important, from Keeley’s reading of this, was a quote from Shamuyarira saying “ZIPRA elements are no longer in the field as bandits, nor are Joshua Nkomo and other ZAPU leaders involved in the second phase of terrorism.” Keeley noted this was “the first time a GOZ minister has said Nkomo and ZAPU are not involved in ‘Super-ZAPU activities’; indeed Prime Minister Mugabe said the contrary only last Wednesday in Parliament.”⁸¹ The clearing of Nkomo and ZAPU was potentially good news, but the allegations and incriminations from Mugabe, Nkala, and other ZANU elites were not to stop in 1984. Nor, sadly, were the attacks on civilians charged with supporting dissidents. The tactics shifted from the 1983 direct attacks on villages, schools, and clinics. The new pattern was to bring individuals to military camps in Matabeleland. In addition, 1984 would see a new curfew and food supplies cut off to certain areas. The *Gukurahundi* was not over.

In February 1984, the US Embassy in Harare would report back to Washington, DC with the news of numerous additional casualties related to Operation *Gukurahundi*. The source of this information was a team of foreign journalists who visited Matabeleland for three

⁸⁰ Brigadier C. E. W Jones to Major General A W Dennis, May 15, 1984, item 39/1 DEFE 24/2789, BNA.

⁸¹ From American Embassy to Secretary of State, “Shamuyarira Says ZAPU Not Involved in Second State Terrorism,” Washington, DC, January 30, 1984, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256750, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y369pzs b>.

days in late February 1984. The accounts of their visit that they shared with Western diplomats reflected new Zimbabwean government and 5 Brigade campaigns in the affected provinces, with the withholding of food aid being deployed as a weapon. In their interviews with “Catholic Church sources,” they learned that there was “no food entering the curfew area,” and that “the GOZ had been systematically slowing the distribution of maize meal supplies to Matabeleland for some months. Now, however, it was denying it to some areas.” Journalists “were shown a letter by senior officials from several churches in Bulawayo dated February 13 to Prime Minister Mugabe. It asked them to take steps to alleviate the food shortages and to curb government forces’ excesses against the Ndebele. So far, the church leaders have received no reply.”⁸²

One of the reporters briefing the Americans had obtained an interview with a retired ZNA general, Mike Shute, a member of the commission established by Mugabe in June 1983 to investigate the 5 Brigade atrocities. Shute told the reporter that “he believed that approximately 30,000 Ndebele have been either abused or killed by the government forces in the past year. Shute stated that the inquiry Commission was so overwhelmed with reports of atrocities during the brief period of time its members held interviews in Bulawayo that the Commission had closed down for the time being.” For the Americans, the most significant point of this reporting was the new number of 30,000 victims. In response, the US State Department sent requests to Ambassador Keeley in Harare for further confirmation of these numbers, as these numbers would likely put Zimbabwe’s substantial US foreign aid at risk. Of note, these numbers were based on evidence collected internally by the Zimbabwean government’s Chihambakwe Commission, on which Shute had served. Shute also expressed doubt that the findings of the Commission “will ever be made public – as promised by Mugabe – because of their controversial nature.”⁸³ In January 1984, ZAPU leader Josiah Chinamano also gave the Americans his prediction that “the Commission won’t amount to much, since the GOZ had stacked the cards against a fair report.” He explained that four of the five members were “ZANU loyalists,” and

⁸² US Embassy, Harare to State Department “Atrocities and Food Shortages in Matabeleland,” February 28, 1984, Declassified Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256769. <https://tinyurl.com/y93kn haz>

⁸³ Ibid.

were never sworn in. He also criticized the process used to collect testimonies: “The Commission had refused to interview people in the rural areas, instead requiring them to travel to Bulawayo. Once these people return to their villages, their lives are in serious danger, and no letter of immunity from prosecution will protect them from a bullet.”⁸⁴

The deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Harare, Edward Lanpher, who had spent many years working on Zimbabwe during the Carter administration, replied to the questions asked about Shute’s number of 30,000 victims, saying that it referred to 1983 numbers, although he added, “But the beatings experienced last year are very much a part of what we are hearing now – how many or how it compares in magnitude with last year we can’t say at this point.” Lanpher added, “The allegations of withholding of food, if proven, represent an ‘abuse’ affecting far more than 30,000 people.” With respect to a question about how the ZNA was behaving in 1984, Lanpher replied that “this year’s offensive against the dissidents is better organized and disciplined than was the case last year. . . . Last year the ZAPU political infrastructure was as much a target of the army as the dissidents.”⁸⁵ There is no indication from the available US files that the large number of alleged victims provided by Shute resulted in any new US approach to Zimbabwe.

A summary of Mugabe’s Independence Day speech on April 17, 1984 was sent to the FCO from Harare and indicated the extent to which Mugabe continued to stress the need for a one-party state, as well as his belief that a one-party state was now attainable after the violence of the previous two years. The summary reinforced that the *Gukurahundi* violence was intended to pave the way for a constitutionally recognized one-party state. Mugabe confidently claimed, “Matabeleland was now under control. The security forces were to be commended: disparagement of their methods would be ignored.” The summary noted that “[i]n other speeches Mugabe also laid into the churches for, as he put it, allowing themselves to be

⁸⁴ Embassy, Harare to State Department, “Staffdel Christenson and Stetson had met with Josiah Chinamano,” January 25, 1984, Declassified Case No F-2012–29009, Doc No CO5256748, <https://tinyurl.com/y6wfxtc6>.

⁸⁵ American Embassy Harare to Secretary of State, “Reports of Atrocities and Food Shortages in Matabeleland,” March 5, 1984, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256775, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y3vx6zse>.

ventriloquized by ZAPU over Matabeleland. This was echoed in a nasty editorial in the *Herald*. The Catholics have issued a pained denial.”⁸⁶

Deputy Chief of Mission Lanpher, who had personally negotiated with Mugabe and Nkomo during crucial moments of the Lancaster House negotiations, described the depths of Mugabe’s rhetorical violence toward Nkomo and the Catholic bishops in Matabeleland. Bishop Karlen was reporting of new 5 Brigade violence in 1984, and Mugabe was asked about this when he made his first trip to Bulawayo in over a year, on April 13 and 14, 1984, under heavy military protection. At the press conference, Mugabe reportedly “rejected allegations of brutality made in a document prepared by Catholic Bishop Karlen . . . which was leaked to the press.”⁸⁷ The next day, he addressed similarly small crowds in Gwanda. Lanpher described the scene based on reports from journalists. “Helicopters, spotter planes, and armored cars with anti-aircraft guns provided security for the PM’s visit to Gwanda.” In contrast, “School children, brought in by army truck, under the supervision of armed soldiers who were ‘protecting them from dissidents,’ listlessly applauded the PM’s arrival.” Mugabe gave his speech in chiShona with government minister Enos Nkala translating into SiNdebele.

Mugabe held a press conference after his Gwanda speech where he defended the curfew and responded to claims that the Zimbabwean government was promoting “mass starvation,” claiming that “this was normal in a ‘war-like operation.’” However, “when pressed about allegations of brutality by troops, particularly five brigade, against civilians rather than dissidents, the Prime Minister became very defensive.” Mugabe reportedly “said civilians who supported dissidents are dissidents themselves, ‘and they all pray to the super-God Nkomo.’”

⁸⁶ From R. P. Ralph Harare to R.H. Brown, FCO, “Independence Day Celebrations,” April 18, 1984, item 11, FCO105/1742 1984, BNA. For more on the response of the Catholic Church and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, see Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence*; Timothy Scarnecchia, “Catholic Voices of the Voiceless: The Politics of Reporting Rhodesian and Zimbabwean State Violence in the 1970s and the Early 1980s,” *Acta Academica* 47, no. 1 (2015), 182–207.

⁸⁷ American Embassy to Secretary of State, “Mugabe Visited Matabeleland: Rejects Allegation of Atrocities and Slams Nkomo’s Book,” Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256815, Date: 09/25/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/yya8te5y>.

He went on to charge the Catholic Church in Matabeleland and Bishop Karlen “of erecting ‘a Mammon of their own in the nature of Joshua Nkomo.’” Mugabe told reporters that “others did not question the allegations because they were made by ‘A Man of God.’ But this man of God was ‘worshipping Mammon instead of the real God.’”⁸⁸

Lanpher reported that Mugabe also took questions at the press conference about Joshua Nkomo’s new autobiography, which had just been published in Harare. Interestingly, besides having said, “most of the book is ‘lies,’” Mugabe brought up two points from the book. The first was a denial that “he had agreed to meet Ian Smith in Lusaka in 1978,” which Nkomo claimed Mugabe had agreed to before consulting Nyerere. The second was Nkomo’s claims that Mugabe had met with the South Africans in Maputo before the 1980 elections. Lanpher ended the telegram by noting that “the PM was characterized as being withdrawn and ill at ease, a description we have heard frequently in recent years.”⁸⁹

The day before Zimbabwe’s Independence Day, 1984, the American Ambassador to the UK, Charles H. Price, reported from London on the large number of “horror stories on Robert Mugabe’s treatment of the people of Matabeleland” appearing in the British Press, including feature stories in the London *Sunday Times* and the *Observer*. What this new reporting revealed was the continued abuses by the 5 Brigade. The editor of the *Observer*, Donald Trelford, is reported to have been in Bulawayo the week before, “where he claims he was contacted in the middle of the night at his hotel and taken to see victims of the Zimbabwe Army depredations.” The story included a description of “the Brigade Major of the Fifth,” who allegedly held up a dead baby to show a village rally, and said, “‘This is a dissident baby. This is what will happen to your babies if you help dissidents.’ He then dropped the tiny corpse to the dust.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Nkomo claimed that Mugabe was prepared to meet Smith in the second meeting before Nyerere and the other Frontline State presidents put a stop to direct talks. See Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo, The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984), 90.

⁹⁰ American Embassy London to State, “Zimbabwe: Tales of Terror from Matabeleland,” April 17, 1984, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256813, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y4o4aae2>.

The report also described Peter Godwin's story for the *Sunday Times*, Godwin had also travelled to speak with witnesses. Both Trelford and Godwin were hearing reports of the "horrors of Bhalagwe camp, near Antelope mine, an abandoned gold mine where many people died from beatings and electric shock treatment." Godwin reported on a mine shaft he visited, "five miles from a Zimbabwe army camp in Southern Matabeleland." Godwin wrote, "According to eyewitnesses every night for 'many weeks' trucks arrived at the shaft from the direction of the army camp at Balagwe [sic]. Corpses were unloaded and thrown in."⁹¹ There were additional stories, and a report that Tiny Rowland, the director of Lonrho and owner of the *Standard*, wrote a letter to Mugabe apologizing for Trelford's story. The embassy also reported that Nkomo was in London to promote his new autobiography. An Nkomo interview with BBC is paraphrased to say, "that Since February he [Nkomo] has repeatedly warned Government ministers that atrocities were being committed; he produced witnesses; and it was all ignored."⁹²

In addition to reporting the continued use of the ZNA and 5 Brigade to carry out acts of terror and torture, Ambassador Price commented on the difference between British and American thinking about Zimbabwe since 1980. Price said that "we sense that the cup of goodwill for the country in this town [London] is pretty well drained." Price observes that "the British never shared the facile euphoria found in Washington in 1980 that somehow Zimbabwe would serve as a model for peaceful change in Southern Africa." Price said that "British pundits felt the bitterness and divisions would seep through the benign façade of peace and unity exemplified by white school children singing independence songs in Shona at Rufare [sic] stadium." Price reflected on how the "spiral downwards – especially in the crucial Shona/Ndebele relationship – has now gone beyond what was predicted by the cynics here." Price has, in what may seem a sympathetic statement, once again restated the premise of Cold War race state thinking. He

⁹¹ Ibid. For a recent discussion of the significance of the Bhalagwe camp in local collective memory, see Shari Eppel, "How Shall We Talk of Bhalagwe? Remembering the Gukurahundi Era in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe," in Kim Wale, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and Jeffrey Prager, eds, *Post-Conflict Hauntings: Transforming Memories of Historical Trauma* (New York: Springer, 2020), 259–84.

⁹² Ibid.

concluded with an observation of British FCO opinion. “We find our FCO contacts benumbed by the current situation and certain of only one thing – there is little they can do to influence events in Zimbabwe for the better.”⁹³

A few months later, in June 1984, The FCO’s Tessa Solesby had the opportunity to visit Harare and Bulawayo. After her visit, her criticisms of Mugabe grew closer to those of High Commissioner Ewans, but she still remained more diplomatic in her approach around the topic of blame. One important exception in her report involved Mugabe’s alleged admission that he was responsible for the “starvation curfew” of 1984. Addressing her own question, “But who is giving what orders?”, Solesby related how she “found no disagreement with our assessment that Mugabe has the dual aim of containing the dissidents and breaking ZAPU political power and believes tough military suppression can achieve both objectives.” Solesby noted that Mugabe “admits to having ordered the ‘starvation’ curfew and must have realized that the innocent would suffer (though there is happily no evidence of deaths).” Such a claim does not coalesce with the reports the Americans received regarding the extent of the starvations in early 1984.⁹⁴ Solesby took a step back, suggesting that “local opinion differs on whether Mugabe can be held responsible for the beatings and killings. He claims that he is not and our High Commission and BMATT tend to give him the benefit of the doubt.” She concluded, however, with reports of local talk arguing that Mugabe could have stopped the killings: “On the other hand others with whom I spoke believe that had Mugabe really wished to avoid atrocities he could have ensured that clear orders were given down the line.”⁹⁵ As careful as Solesby was to not comport total responsibility to Mugabe, she was nonetheless critical, as she included the following summary: “All of this is consistent with at least a readiness by Mugabe to turn a blind eye to a level of violence which we would consider unacceptable.”⁹⁶ For

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ For the larger context and more details on this phase of the *Gukurahundi*, see Hazel Cameron, “State-Organized Starvation: A Weapon of Extreme Mass Violence in Matabeleland South, 1984,” *Genocide Studies International* 12, no. 1 (2018), 26–47.

⁹⁵ Miss T A H Solesby, “Zimbabwe: Visit to Harare and Bulawayo,” June 12, 1984, item 17, FCO36/1929, BNA.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Solesby, this was a fairly serious criticism, but this point was not accompanied by any suggestion of public criticisms of Mugabe.

On August 15, 1984, the US Embassy reported the following from a response during Mugabe's prime minister's question time concerning his stated goal of establishing a one-party state in Zimbabwe: "Cde [Comrade] Mugabe said a one-party state was a 'desirable state of affairs' as it made for greater democracy. A one-party state was a way of life in Africa, and in Zimbabwe it should be established 'as soon as possible' after the next general election." Mugabe added, amid laughter, "There can be only one cock – we cannot have two cocks. There was only one Mzilikazi, and not two. There was only one Lobengula and not two."⁹⁷ As insulting this sort of language was to Ndebele and Zimbabwean history, Mugabe certainly knew it was the sort of "joke" that was meant to ridicule and humiliate Nkomo.

British high commissioner Martin Ewans would report in November 1984 on Mugabe's speech at the funeral of a ZANU-PF senator and Central Committee member. Senator Moven Ndlovu's murder started a new cycle of violence against ZAPU politicians and supporters.⁹⁸ Mugabe, according to Ewans, "made a forceful speech castigating ZAPU, whose 'underground armed bandits' he held responsible, saying the time had come to declare ZAPU an enemy of the people and to show them that ZANU (PF) could 'bite.'" The report stated that "Nkomo had denied ZAPU's involvement, but Mugabe has sacked the remaining ZAPU members of his government."⁹⁹ The two remaining ZAPU members were John Nkomo and Cephias Msika. This started another phase of anti-ZAPU violence in the *Gukurahundi* leading up to the 1985 elections. The violence continued after, as Norma Kriger notes: "Mugabe was disappointed that ZAPU had retained 15 of the

⁹⁷ Fm AmEmbassy Harare to SecState WashDC, "Mugabe's Question Time in Parliament," August 17, 1984, Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012-29009, Doc No. C05256850, Date: 09/24/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/yct7vhj68>. The quote does not appear in the Hansard transcript of this question time, although its appearance in the pro-ZANU *Herald* newspaper makes it likely that Mugabe did say this, but it was not included in the Hansard.

⁹⁸ David Coltart describes the crackdown on ZAPU members after the murder and the questionable circumstances of the Senator's murder. No one was ever charged for the murder but this did not stop the abuses of ZAPU members in the area. Coltart, *The Struggle continues*, 160–63.

⁹⁹ From Harare to FCO. "Security Situation," November 12, 1984, FCO 105/1742, BNA.

16 Matabeleland seats. Almost immediately after the polls closed, violence flared up again, spurred on by Mugabe's advice to his supporters to 'go and uproot the weeds from your garden.'" Once again, Mugabe labelled Nkomo and ZAPU as "enemies of the country."¹⁰⁰

In February 1985, the US Embassy was reporting "that ZANU, in one way or another, has been going after ZAPU/the Ndebele in a targeted manner." Reports included "beatings administered by bussed-in ZANU youth league groups, and CIO/5 Brigade hit squads taking ZAPU people from their homes in the middle of the night." This hit squad was said to be terrorizing the Beitbridge area to "put ZAPU on notice that the Beitbridge killing of Senator Ndlovu last November would not go unpunished."¹⁰¹

The last two chapters have demonstrated the shift in Western diplomatic approaches to the government of Zimbabwe, as well as the competition between Mugabe and Nkomo that had caused much preoccupation in the years preceding the transfer to majority rule in 1980. The key elements of this transition were, on the one hand, the preoccupation with keeping Zimbabwe a pro-Western ally in the Cold War context of the early 1980s, and on the other hand, the shift toward viewing Mugabe and his government as a black African race state as news of brutal state crimes against civilians became well known. The first two years of the transition involved monitoring the treatment of white Zimbabweans, and criticisms from Britain over the torture of white Air Force servicemen, which created a debate over the future of the British BMATT program in Zimbabwe. Once reports of mass killings began to surface in February and March of 1983, Western diplomats attempted to put some pressure on Mugabe and others to stop the killings, usually couched in terms of what these killings were doing to Zimbabwe's international reputation, rather than in terms of direct threats to cut off development and military assistance. Mugabe, however, understood that this localized diplomatic pressure was not likely to result in serious consequences for him or his government in terms of foreign aid and

¹⁰⁰ Norma Kriger, "ZANU(PF) Strategies in General Elections, 1980–2000: Discourse and Coercion," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005), 10. See pp. 7–13 for a fuller discussion of the 1985 violence. See also Coltart, *The Struggle Continues*, 155–59; Doran, *Kingdom Power, Glory* (Kindle edition, location 10206 of 20982).

¹⁰¹ American Embassy Harare to Secretary State Washington, DC, "Matabeleland 'on Boil' Again," Unclassified US Department of State Case No. F-2012–29009, Doc No. C05256903, Date: 09/30/2013, <https://tinyurl.com/y2ut34o8>.

continued cooperation with the West. He was, after all, still the Cold War ally the United States and Britain wanted to support. Even if he was uncooperative on a number of issues.

While this chapter focused on diplomatic responses to the mass killings committed during Operation *Gukurahundi*, it is important to remember that diplomats were not the only pressure groups in Zimbabwe. As the noted evidence shows, the religious community, the doctors, and the legal community in Zimbabwe did much of the actual work to call attention to the killings. Journalists also had a crucial role in getting the story out, which, in turn, was used by diplomats to put “soft” pressure on Mugabe and others to “rein in” the 5 Brigade in 1983. This was not enough to stop the violence. Another important role in publicizing the evidence of *Gukurahundi* violence came from Joshua Nkomo himself. He effectively used his Parliamentary privileges to publicize the accounts of victims in 1983 and in 1984. He also publicized the killings while in London. As Shari Eppel has pointed out, “what you saw was 5 Brigade on a learning curve of how to get more clandestine with each passing year.” The public pressure from groups inside Zimbabwe, and international media coverage, and pressures about media coverage from diplomats meant that the *Gukurahundi* tactics shifted from the 5 Brigade atrocities of early 1983, to the use of military bases for killings and torture in 1984, to the use of “hit squads” and disappearances in 1985.¹⁰²

This chapter, therefore, provides a crucial counterpoint for the “race state” thesis put forth in previous chapters. The question to consider, from a race state perspective, then, is how the ways in which diplomats and entire foreign relations bureaucracies framed Zimbabwean politics before 1980 allowed them to confidently shift their perspective to fit a new concept of Zimbabwe as an “African state,” where political violence, lack of rights for citizens, and autocracy was viewed as the norm. This rationalization would then allow the international community to overlook human rights abuses carried out by the state under the direction of its highest leaders.

¹⁰² Personal communications with the author, October 23, 2014. For full quote, see Timothy Scarnecchia, “Catholic Voices of the Voiceless,” 202–3. See Shari Eppel, “Repairing a Fractured Nation: Challenges and Opportunities in Post-GPA Zimbabwe,” in Brian Raftopoulos, ed., *The Hard Road to Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe’s Global Political Agreement* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2013), 211–50; Eppel, “Gukurahundi.”