

## **The Gukurahundi Genocide, Entumbane war, Prince Charles and the British involvement**

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Gukurahundi was NOT deployed to quell armed thugs, it was deployed to kill Ndebele civilians. Until 1987, armed Bandits were dealt with chiefly by the four brigades of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), the Police Support Unit (PSU), the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), and a specialist ZNA force, the Paratroopers. In contrast, the government offensive against the ordinary civilians of Matabeleland was assigned to 5 Brigade, also referred to as the Fifth Brigade. The Fifth Brigade was recruited chiefly from ZANLA guerrillas, whereas the other four brigades were composed of ZANLA, ZIPRA, and Rhodesian soldiers. Mugabe himself had first hinted at the idea of a guerrilla unit to be trained to combat “malcontents” who were “unleashing a reign of terror,” in a speech in August 1980 on Heroes’ Day (held to celebrate those who died fighting for Zimbabwe’s freedom).

The Fifth Brigade was trained and armed by the North Koreans, beginning in August 1981. In contrast, the other brigades had already been merged and were being trained by the British. While there was an effort to assert the loyalty of the four brigades to the state, the Fifth Brigade repeatedly asserted it was responsible only to Mugabe, who christened the unit Gukurahundi. The Fifth Brigade also had distinctive uniforms and used AK47s. Led by ex-ZANLA guerrilla Perence Shiri, 5 Brigade was deployed in Matabeleland between 1983 and 1985 and went after ex-ZIPRA guerrillas, ZAPU officials, and basically, all Ndebele who were portrayed as dissident supporters. It has been held responsible for most atrocities of this period. These include thousands of deaths – 2,000 civilian deaths in six weeks alone in 1983 – mass beatings, disappearances, mass detentions, torture at camps, and rapes. These atrocities far exceed the extremely brutal murders, rapes, and robberies committed by the dissidents.

In the July 1985 parliamentary elections ZANU(PF) expected to trounce ZAPU in its Matabeleland stronghold. Despite pre-election violence against ZAPU supporters, which seemed often to have government approval, ZAPU won all fifteen seats in Matabeleland but lost five seats elsewhere. ZANU(PF) was angry. A spate of violence against ZAPU supporters followed the election, spurred on by Prime Minister Mugabe’s advice to his supporters to “go and uproot the weeds from your garden.” High-level ZAPU and former ZIPRA members in the army were detained on charges of treason but the state was unable to prove its case. ZAPU rallies were banned in June 1987 and ZAP offices closed in September 1987, effectively banning the party. Meanwhile, since 1986 the ruling party had also been pursuing a strategy of co-opting ZAPU into ZANU(PF) Forcing people belonging to other parties to join it, ZANU(PF) behaved as if it were already a one-party state.

In early November 1980 Chinamano alluded to the dangers of ZANU(PF) slogans which denigrated armed men who had no platform from which to answer back – a reference to ZIPRA in assembly camps and slogans such as Pasi ne Machuwachuwa (Down with ZIPRA), Pasi ne vanematumbu (Down with those with big stomachs –a reference to Nkomo), and Pasi ne Vadzvinyiriri (Down with oppressors). ZANU(PF)’s “radical” cabinet ministers belittled ZIPRA, ZAPU, and Nkomo’s role in the liberation struggle, often at party rallies in Bulawayo,

Matabeleland, historically ZAPU's turf, and frequently called for a one-party state. ZANU(PF) Minister Enos Nkala – an Ndebele who had failed to win a seat in Matabeleland in the independence election – told a party rally in Bulawayo in June 1980 that some armed "dissidents" were Ndebeles who were calling for a second war of liberation because their leader Nkomo was not in power, and that "my personal opinion is that we should have a one-party state in this country." Soon after, Nkala told a ZANU(PF) rally in Bulawayo that the party's task "from now is to crush Joshua Nkomo" whom he called "a self-appointed Ndebele king." When ZAPU and Muzorewa's UANC challenged Nkala's call for a one-party state, saying ZAPU was in the government because of its heroic war contribution, Nkala responded: "They contributed in their own small way and we have given them a share proportional to their contributions." In early July 1980, Minister Tekere, who was also ZANU(PF) secretary-general, told a rally he had been trying to depose Nkomo since 1961. Claiming that ZANU(PF) had been disciplined by war, and referring implicitly to ZAPU having withheld most of its forces during the war, Tekere asked rhetorically: "do you know what war is, dear Nkomo?" Tekere claimed that the behavior of the "Nkomo group" "lends easy temptation to me to begin to wonder whether a one-party state is not desirable at some stage."

After guerrilla faction fighting in Bulawayo in November 1980, Minister Tekere said Nkomo was in government as an act of "charity." "We did not need his army in the war, so why are they making a nuisance of themselves now?" and he called for disarming ZIPRA cadres. A ZANU(PF) MP told parliament on May 20, 1980 that "the Government must work seriously and quickly for the abolition of ZIPRA and the Rhodesian armed forces." ZANU(PF) leaders charged Nkomo with presiding over a police force which was hostile to ZANU(PF) and ZANLA, and called for or supported ZANLA and others to usurp the police role. On trial in November 1980 for allegedly murdering a white man, ZANU(PF) Minister Tekere's defense document noted that "he and some of his fellow Ministers honestly believed that the police still displayed loyalty to the former administration and not exclusively to the present Government, and second, (that) he was aware that the Minister in charge of the police was the person to whom the ZIPRA elements continued to owe allegiance." Some ZANU(PF) ministers and deputy ministers agreed.

### **Different approach to ZANLA dissidents**

ZANU(PF)'s tacit support for ZANLA "dissidents" was pervasive. From March 1980, ZANLA guerrillas on ZANU(PF) farms (Grazely and Oasis) in Goromonzi district (in Mashonaland East province) had killed and assaulted white farmers and mine managers, attacked police and police stations, intervened in disputes between farm workers and farmers, and politicized and intimidated farm labourers. Following incidents in September 1980, the government sent the Police Support Unit to monitor and control the former ZANLA guerrillas. The Police Support Unit and the police had been used against the guerrillas in the war, and ZANLA guerrillas demanded their withdrawal to defuse the tension that their presence had fuelled. ZANLA liaison officer from Grazely Farm, Mr. One O'Clock, an appointee of the ZANLA army commander, said: "We [ZANLA] have tried to talk about means of abolishing the dispute between the comrades and the Support Unit. If there are police or Support Unit who come to this area, the comrades should be aware of their presence because the comrades become suspicious." He advocated

joint patrols of police and “comrades.” Mugabe acceded to the request, and said he did not think it was necessary for the army to be used because he had instructed that the guerrillas in Goromonzi be disarmed – something that did not occur. Also reflecting support for ZANLA “dissidents,” the ruling party paid the legal fees of some ZANLA guerrillas accused of murder.

The ruling party blamed guerrilla faction fighting in the urban cantonments in Chitungwiza (near Harare) and Entumbane (in Bulawayo) in late 1980 and early 1981 on ZAPU and ZIPRA. Heavy fighting erupted in Entumbane on November 9 and 10, 1980, leaving 55 people dead, 550 injured, and 2,000 homes damaged. Local Government and Housing Minister, Eddison Zvobgo, blamed ZAPU for “whipping up” the tension in Bulawayo and said that there was evidence that the problems had been caused by “rabble-rousers and political malcontents who are still licking their wounds as a result of having lost in the elections this year.” Mugabe blamed undisciplined ZIPRA elements for starting the fighting and called the bands that went on a rampage in the western suburbs “disloyal, misguided and politically motivated armed hooligans and political malcontents whose final objective, according to the information before me, is to create chaos and lawlessness so as to pave the way for the eventual fall of my Government.” Nkomo and the white mayor of Bulawayo both blamed the fighting on the inflammatory speeches made by ministers Kangai, Shamuyarira, Zvobgo, and Nkala in Bulawayo the morning before, and ZIPRA commanders blamed ZANLA for starting the fighting.

Between February 7 and 10, 1981, even more serious fighting broke out in the Entumbane cantonments and spread to three integrated military units. At Entumbane alone, the understated death toll was 197 – one estimate was that over 300 ex-guerrillas had died – and 1,600 homes were damaged. ZANLA guerrillas and ZANU(PF) government ministers including Mugabe again blamed ZIPRA for starting the fighting, and claimed the events exhibited “very sinister undertones, a definite organised pattern.” To end the November 1980 and February 1981 fighting, the Rhodesian army and air force had intervened on the government’s side. The use of the Rhodesian army against only ZIPRA guerrillas in the second round of major fighting at Entumbane escalated ZIPRA fears and suspicions and gave momentum to a wider ZIPRA resistance to the ruling party. In March 1981 the government established a commission of inquiry to investigate the “mutinous disturbances” in Entumbane camps and in the three integrated battalions at Ntabazinduna, Glenville, and Connemara. Presented to Mugabe in June 1981, the report has not been made public. Allegedly, it “fell short of government expectations” for apportioning blame because it remained neutral. Put differently, ZANLA/ZANU(PF) did not emerge blameless.

### **Prince Charles a Gukurahundist**

Later, in March 1984, Prince Charles embarked on an official visit to Zimbabwe. On his return to Britain, the Prince lunched with Peter Preston, editor of The Guardian and Donald Treford, editor of The Observer (who had himself published his own eye witness account of the atrocities in Matabeleland). As Treford relates, „In general conversation over lunch, because it was soon after I’d been to Matabeleland and obviously it was a subject to talk about, the subject came up. He [Prince Charles] said “Ah yes, those massacres in Matabeleland, the

Foreign Office told me that it was all exaggerated”“. It is in fact emblematic that so indifferent were the British to the state-sponsored atrocities of Gukurahundi that Robert Mugabe was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Edinburgh in 1984 for his services to education after much lobbying by Lord Carrington the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs 1979–1982.

Incredibly, Colonel Perence Shiri, the commander of the Fifth Brigade throughout the period of Gukurahundi, was invited to take a place at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London in 1986.

### **Mnangagwa a Gukurahundist**

The offensive by the Government of Zimbabwe continued, with Minister of State for Security, Mnangagwa, making a public statement on 4 March, at a rally held not far from Lupane. His statement was reported in *The Chronicle*, 5 March 1983. „He told his audience that [the] government had “an option” of “burning down all the villages infected with dissidents.” He warned “the campaign against dissidents can only succeed if the infrastructure which nurtures them is destroyed.” In a supercilious manner he chillingly described dissidents as “cockroaches” and the Fifth Brigade as “DDT” brought in to eradicate them”. The very next day the largest recorded massacre occurred at Ciwale in Northern Lupane with the death of 55 people. „Mnangagwa, in these statements and in others he made later, made clear plainly that the action against the civilian population of Matabeleland was part of a deliberate state policy.”

### **British support of Gukurahundi**

(4 March, 1983) British High Commissioner Byatt met with Minister of Defence Sekeramayi and told him that „we sympathise with the difficulties his government face in handling the dissident problem. We did not wish to add to these”. Byatt continued, saying he „thought that Zimbabwe’s image and international reputation would suffer badly if the kind of reports which had been appearing recently were to continue over any protracted period of time I urged him strongly to ensure that excesses were curbed and that, while military force was needed no more was used than was essential to the requirement of the moment.... I said, again speaking personally, that in addition to our concern for Zimbabwe’s security and for her international reputation ... we had to be particularly careful of the reputation of our army”. Byatt ended by advising London „I am sure that our best tactic is to continue to try to proffer sympathetic and constructive, rather than simply critical, advice if we wish to influence Zimbabwean decisions”.

The rationale for such decision making is undoubtedly multi-stranded, however it is quite clear that one of the major concerns for the British is „the reputation of [their] army” and British public opinion as opposed to the ongoing atrocities and human violations. Just over two weeks later, the British defence attache in Harare noted in a cable to the British Ministry of Defence (MOD) that „although 1 BDE [Brigade] are still reporting to army ops room 5 BDE are not. I presume COMD [Command] 5 BDE to be operating on the loose direction of [Rex] Nhongo41 or Sekeramayi”, and not the ZNA High Command. The British defence attache continued „you [MOD] have some details of 5 BDE excesses. Ministerial statements in the last 24 hours have given full support for their [Fifth Brigade] actions...indications are that they [Fifth Brigade] have

been launched as a „mailed fist“ to deal not only with dissidents, but to scare the local population out of providing support for them. We have reports of murders and beatings by 5 BDE. There is no doubt that the situation has seriously deteriorated in Matabeleland“.

At this early stage, it appears that the British High Commissioner was unclear on the command structure in relation to the acts of violence being committed by fifth brigade in Matabeleland, however he does claim that there was Ministerial support for the „murders and beatings by 5 BDE.“

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