

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN ZIMBABWE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is a concept that gained currency as a development agenda in the aftermath of the cold war. It refers to a host of reform interventions related to the reform of sections of the public sector engaged in the provision of both internal and external security. These include the defence forces, intelligence services, police, the judiciary and the prison service. SSR aims at providing effective state and human security through democratic governance, respect for the rule of law and human rights. Zimbabwe has a complex security sector that emerged from a merger of former belligerents in the war of liberation, namely the Rhodesia security forces, Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA). SSR in Zimbabwe is therefore largely influenced not just by the dynamics of the post-Cold War politics but also by the legacy of the armed liberation struggle.

The historical dynamics of security in Zimbabwe

The dynamics of security in Zimbabwe are complex. As Hendricks and Hutton (2009) put it, there is the inter-play between the inherited 'colonial institutional heritage' and 'the liberation culture that gave birth to Zimbabwe'. The evolution of Zimbabwe as a nation has been punctuated by epochs of inter-related violent conflict as different groups sought to exert their power and dominance on the others from the pre-colonial times to the present. During the pre-colonial times, the quest for dominance was expressed through means of violent conquest and mutiny/rebellion, largely manifested by violent raids for cattle, women and labour (Mazarire: 2009).

Ironically, this phase of Zimbabwean history was itself dislodged violently. The advent of colonialism brought in a colonial state that was to enjoy 90 years of domination built on superior military might. The colonial state perpetrated violent dispossessions of livestock and land, relocations of the dispossessed people to marginalised lands, brutal exploitation of African labour and institutionalised racial discrimination. Dissent was repressed in exceptionally brutal ways, some of which included herding whole populations into concentration camps euphemistically referred to as 'protected villages' and the massacre of thousands of people in refugee camps in Zambia and Mozambique. These repressive and discriminatory practices caused the African nationalists to embark on an equally violent struggle to topple the colonial state and replace it with a democratic government characterised by racial equality. However, this racial conflict was itself fraught with violent disagreements and conflicts among the African nationalists themselves. There was the inter-nationalist conflict, generally perceived on ethnic lines and the intra-party conflicts that had their bases on ideological, ethnic, class and gender differences.

At independence, the new ZANU (PF) government was confronted by the challenge of establishing a secure nation state, not only in view of the legacy of this multiplicity of

conflicts, but also of the threat posed by apartheid South Africa. As its policy of reconciliation was parochially conceptualised, the gravity of the situation soon came to the fore with the serious conflicts within the newly created Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), composed of former ZANLA, ZIPRA and RA forces. Without a properly conceptualised demobilization and integration strategy,¹ fighting broke out in the barracks, notably at Entumbane in Bulawayo and in Chitungwiza. Cadres from the former ZIPRA raised serious concerns over their marginalisation in the military integration process, the demobilisation exercise and trivialisation of their contribution to the liberation effort.

The ensuing conflict turned nasty and bloody as sections of the former ZIPRA force took up arms and turned against the government, resulting in over 20 000 civilians perishing under brutal conditions at the hands of both the security forces and the dissidents. The physical and psychological scars left by this bloody conflict remain a site of struggle that continues to derail the quest for national solidarity and security.

The Unity Accord between ZANU (PF) and (PF) ZAPU that brought the civil strife in Matabeleland and the Midlands to an end in December 1987 did not, however, result in sustained security stability in the country.² The economic meltdown that followed the country's adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991 resulted in political turmoil by the late 1990s. In 1997, the war veterans, who had hitherto remained on the sidelines of mainstream politics, now came into the fore as they resuscitated their war-time alliance with the party in a desperate bid to establish both 'power and legitimacy' after years of neglect by ZANU (PF) (Muzondidya, 2009). Soon, an orgy of violence erupted when Zimbabweans in the urban areas embarked on food riots in March and November 1998 and the state responded by deploying security troops in the townships to quell the riots.

The deteriorating situation culminated in the coalescence of civic society and labour into a political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in September 1999. ZANU (PF) felt shaken and threatened, particularly after the MDC and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) inspired the nation to vote against a state-sponsored constitution in a referendum in February 2000. Thereafter, the country descended into eight years of more protracted violence as ZANU (PF) used "harassment, torture and murder" against its opponents in a desperate bid to cling on to power at all cost (Raftopoulos, 2009: 224). By 2008, the security sector had become systematically entrenched in the country's political life.

¹ See Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, for a more nuanced theoretical discussion of a proper demobilization and (re)integration strategy, pp15-20 and Musemwa, M., 'The Ambiguities of Democracy: The Demobilisation of the Zimbabwe Ex-Combatants and the Ordeal of Rehabilitation, 1980-1993,' *Transformations*, 26, 1995.

² Critics of the accord lambaste it for merely bringing together the two former liberation parties without encompassing other key players in the new fledgling nation state. See, for instance, Raftopoulos, B., 'Unreconciled differences'.

The ZNA, comprising the army and the air force, became involved in ‘domestic law enforcement’³ while many reports condemned the police for becoming highly partisan and engaging in gross human rights abuses, violence, torture and intimidation of political opponents and civic activists. Similarly, the intelligence services sector operated without recourse to the law or any system of controls and checks and balances. It infiltrated all levels of society, instilling fear through its repression of the opposition and intolerance of views divergent to those of ZANU (PF). To compound it all, the prison services abused prisoners and denied them their rights. A report in October 2008 revealed that two inmates were dying a day in Zimbabwe’s prisons due to hunger and disease. However, under concerted pressure from the MDC, civil society and international powers, ZANU (PF) acquiesced to a South African-Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)-brokered agreement that resulted in an inclusive government coming into power in February 2009.

Prospects

This multiplicity of military/security concerns, struggles and conflicts in the past decade has made the need for reform of the security sector an urgent issue in Zimbabwe. Several factors seem to work in favour of this agenda:

- a) The Global Political Agreement (GPA) that ushered in the current Government of National Unity (GNU) spells out the need for SSR in Zimbabwe. Under Article XIII of the Agreement, the Parties agreed “that there be inclusion in the training curriculum of members of the uniformed forces of the subjects on human rights, international humanitarian law and statute law so that there is greater understanding and full appreciation of their roles and duties in a multi-party democratic system.” This makes SSR a legally constituted priority agenda item for the government.
- b) The above is further bolstered by the existence of both a regional and continental commitment through SADC and the AU to support and effect security sector reform.
- c) The apparent shift from the then President Mbeki-inspired kid-glove quiet diplomacy to a more decisive push on the principals of the GPA to honour the agreement by President Zuma is a positive sign for all forms of reform in Zimbabwe.
- d) There is a possibility that the generality of the personnel in the security sector will not allow themselves to continue being “used” in support of moribund politics and politicians.
- e) The country already has in place effective legal frameworks on arms control/possession and was able to successfully disarm former combatants.

Challenges

The quest for security sector reform in Zimbabwe is however faced with several challenges:

- a) The security forces, in their alliance with the political leadership, have been exclusively preoccupied with a perceived national security threat (from the west) at the expense of human security and a culture of respect for human rights

³ www.ssrnetwork.net/doc library/

(Hendricks and Hutton, 2009a: 2. The security sector has operated above the law without any transparency or accountability to anyone else but the state president. The party has steadfastly refused to divorce itself from this nationally undesirable marriage, the new political dispensation of inclusiveness notwithstanding. The ZANU (PF) Congress of December 2009 passed the following critical resolution: “ZANU (PF) as the party of revolution and the people’s vanguard shall not allow the security forces to be the subject of any negotiation for a so-called security sector reform,” ostensibly because the “security forces are a product of the national liberation struggle” ([http:// www.nation. co.ke\(20/12/2009\)](http://www.nation.co.ke(20/12/2009))). ZANU (PF) would have the world believe the Zimbabwe liberation struggle is an exclusively ZANU (PF) product.⁴ Today, therefore, as Hendricks and Hutton (2003: 2) posit, “[T]he influence of the armed liberation struggle on the conduct of state security in Zimbabwe continues....”

- b) Further to this is the challenge of the lack of a political will to see reforms in the security sector that would upset the status quo. As the crisis in Zimbabwe⁵ deepened, and threats to its leadership became apparent with the loss in the February 2000 Constitutional Referendum, ZANU (PF) strengthened its alliance with the security sector, resuscitating the war-time alliance formed between the ZANU political/civilian leadership and the military leaders through an eight member council, *Dare Re Chimurenga*, in April 1969 (Martin and Johnson, 1981: 16). By 2008, JOC, comprising of President Mugabe, his vice presidents and the security chiefs, was the dominant body directing national policy. In other words, the political leaders owe their political survival to the fear of force offered by the security forces as evidenced in the run-up to the June 2008 election re-run when the electorate was brutalized by the security forces to coerce them to vote for ZANU (PF). This explains President Mugabe’s refusal to have the security sector reformed, declaring, “May I state this clearly and categorically, as ZANU (PF) the defence of our sovereignty rests with us and with no other. Any manoeuvres to tamper with the forces will never be entertained by us” (http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/dec13a_2009.html).
- c) Leaders of the security forces themselves have made it abundantly clear that they would not salute any political leader without liberation war credentials. They thus shunned the swearing in of the leader of the MDC as Prime Minister at the launch of the GNU.
- d) War veterans command a lot of influence on governance and security as evidenced by their arm twisting the government in 1997 to give them one-off

⁴ See works on Patriotic history for this discourse, eg, Ranger, T. ‘Historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: The struggle over the past in Zimbabwe,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30 (2), 2004, Nyakudya, M. ‘The Rational for National and Strategic Studies in Teacher Training Colleges: Fostering a sense of Patriotism in Trainee Teachers’ in *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, 2007, pp.115-126.

⁵ See Raftopoulos. “Crisis in Zimbabwe” for a broad analysis of the political and economic decline that defines what has come to be referred to as the “Crisis in Zimbabwe” in Raftopoulos and Mlambo (eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*, Harare, Weaver Press, 2009.

payments of a staggering but unbudgeted Z\$50 000 (US\$6 000) and their role in the fast-track land redistribution exercise from 2000. However, they are not institutionalized as a security body and are therefore not subject to any oversight measures that may be undertaken in the security sector.

- e) Then there is the critical question of civil-military relations, in particular, the highly militarised nature of the country's institutions. Rupiya (2003:251-64). succinctly shows how the executive has since the 1990s militarised civilian posts, denting the 'institutional inter-relationships' that had hitherto evolved in the country This concentrates power in the executive and entrenches state control over the affected institutions since the military appointees to civilian posts are answerable to the executive rather than the institutions.⁶ Inevitably, the military has become heavily involved in law enforcement in times of protests and demonstrations (Hendricks and Hutton, 2009b:4). For this and other reasons, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003: 33) concludes that "[U]ntil Zimbabweans are delivered from the pervasive fear of their police, their army, their government and their leaders, there will never be cordial civil-military relations in the country."

Conclusion

It is clear that reform of the security sector in Zimbabwe should be an urgent national agenda item. However, while there are some important factors working in favour of that agenda, the challenges are quite debilitating, notably the legacy of the armed struggle that left the military with heavy political influence. It is therefore imperative that, as Hendricks and Hutton (2009b:11) suggest, a delicate balancing of the critical question of amnesty and retribution be worked out.

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