



A Critique of Civil-Military Relations: The Case of Zimbabwe's Praetorian Military, 1980-2008

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ABSTRACT

Since 1980, civil-military relations in Zimbabwe have been shaped by the dominant presence of a praetorian military that enforces substantial political, social, and economic constraints, thereby undermining the constitutionalism and democratic principles that previously characterised the nation as the 'African jewel'. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the Zimbabwean military's involvement in the state was shaped not by the peculiarities of its leaders or personal goals, but by a confluence of ideological, political, and economic objectives. The paper uses a qualitative secondary research methodology to accomplish this objective. Theorising civil-military relations through the lens of Samuel Huntington and the historical analysis of the Zimbabwean praetorian military. This paper contends that a symbiotic relationship, facilitated by various conceptual characteristics of praetorian militaries, existed between the ruling Zimbabwean African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Zimbabwean military. This relationship enabled the military to assert its agency economically and politically while simultaneously reinforcing ZANU-PF's political dominance through its participation in managing the civil disturbances of the 1980s, the civil war in the Congo, elections, and the governance structures of the state. In conclusion, challenges posed by these relations led to weakened democratic institutions, undermining civil government and more power given to the military.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1980, Zimbabwe's civil-military relations have been influenced and punctuated by the overbearing pre-eminence of a praetorian military that imposes significant political, social, and economic guardian restrictions, consequently repudiating the constitutionalism and democratic constructs that once defined the country as the 'African jewel'.¹ There is an emphasis on existential security problematic at different epochs in Zimbabwe's developmental trajectories, which made its military the site and source of the regime's security framework. This is to argue that a civilian-military conundrum emerged in which the country was beset by the insurmountable legacies of its war of liberation, destabilising apartheid South Africa, the land question, opposition politics, human rights conundrum, and an explosive post-2000 socio-economic crisis that punctuated the regime's ability to assert consensual control and this had a bearing on the security configuration of the state- the inability to build a military which is loyal to the state than

¹ Maurice Taonezvi Vambe, "Zimbabwe: The Fall from a Jewel Status," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).

narrow interests of the regime.² Consequently, an organic and symbiotic link emerged between the articulation and conception of civil-military relations of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), its conception of security threats, and the partisan willingness of the Zimbabwean military to become a potent tool of the ruling party.³ This argument gives weight to how, at different decisive political epochs, the distinctions between national security and regime threats were blurred, leading to a modification of Zimbabwe's security posture in which the Mugabe regime instrumentally used the military to neutralise its perceived political enemies.⁴

The ill-fated cases of Zimbabwe's main political opposition, namely the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) (1980-87) and the Movement for Democratic Change (2000-) reveal how a country's military becomes the pulse of security of a regime by either curtailing or eliminating alternative sources and theatres of political contestation. In doing so, the Zimbabwean military fits the description of a praetorian military, a decisive political actor that manipulates a country's socioeconomic and correlation forces in its favor. This argument is made through an examination of the socio-political and economic crisis that characterised post-2000 Zimbabwe, leading to a two-way traffic of the politicisation of the military and the militarisation of politics in which the lines between the regime and national security threats were blurred.⁵ Such was depicted by a corporatist element in the Zimbabwean army during its intervention in the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998 as politico-military entrepreneurs, and its involvement in three critical areas: elections, governance and economic initiatives. Another case in point is the 2017 military orchestrated political changes that led to the forceful resignation of President Mugabe, the ascension to power of Emmerson Mnangagwa and some elements of the military in what is now commonly referred to as the Second Republic. Therefore, this paper reviewed various academic literature to collect data. These sources include a vast repository of data on the praetorian nature of the Zimbabwean military.

THEORISING CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

The standard theoretical entry point on civil-military relations is Samuel Huntington's thesis *The Soldier and the State*, whose argument seeks to analyse civilian authority-military relations from an 'objective civilian control' lens.⁶ This theory gives credence to Western liberal political thought on the premium placed on security sector reforms in democratic societies. Emphasis is placed on measures undertaken by civilian governments to prevent the militarisation of civilian affairs. A symbiotic relationship may exist between military and civilian authority, wherein politicians lacking military expertise should refrain from determining military strategy. The professional military possesses inherent limitations, including a normative comprehension of its limited competencies in civilian matters, and allegiance to civilian leadership, while the civilian authorities acknowledge its professional expertise and autonomy in military strategic decisions.⁷ Conversely, Morris Janowitz, in *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, gives credence to societal and cultural values a military seeks to preserve as an essential variable in reviewing civil-military relations.⁸ Ruptures in civil-military relations often occur against misalignment of societal-cultural values between the military and civilian authority. Such prompts the military defiance of civilian authority as Feaver broadens the conception of military defiance to civilian authority as a result of structural conditions such as an illegitimate civilian regime, incapacitated civilian regime, weakened democratic systems, and or a tendency by a civilian government to use the military to neutralise heightened

² Abiodun Alao, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe* (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2012).

³ Bryan Kauma and Sandra Swart, "Hunger and Power: Politics, Food (in)Security and the Development of Small Grains in Zimbabwe, 2000-2010," *Historia* 67, no. 1 (July 8, 2022): 144–76, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-8392/2022/v67n1a6>.

⁴ Gilbert Tarugarira, "The Military and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1970s to 2018," in *Military, Politics and Democratization in Southern Africa: The Quest for Political Transition* (Springer, 2023), 37–51.

⁵ Patrick Dzimiri and Obinna Richard Iroanya, "Military Orchestrated Leadership Change in Zimbabwe and the Quest for Political Transition," in *Military, Politics and Democratization in Southern Africa: The Quest for Political Transition* (Springer, 2023), 83–105.

⁶ Samuel P Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, vol. 199 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁷ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.

⁸ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Simon and Schuster, 2017).

political moments instrumentally.⁹ These structural conditions share comparable justifications with the entry of praetorian militaries in their involvement in civilian affairs.

Military Praetorianism as a Subset of Civil-military Relations

Scholars from different civil-military traditions have traced the origins of praetorian militaries to the Roman Empire. This is in reference to the Roman Praetorian Guard, which became ‘king-killers’ and ‘kingmakers’ by influencing and determining successive Roman leaders at different times. Praetorianism bears a resemblance today, finding expression as a typology of civil-military relations in which the military becomes a locomotive in changing a country’s political course or asymmetrically controlling civilian authority decisions.¹⁰ Taking the definition of Friedrich Mandell Watkins, praetorianism is “a situation when the military class of a given society exercises independent political power within it by virtue of an actual or threatened use of military force.”¹¹

Further classical praetorianism scholars, such as Eric Nordlinger, have broadened our conception of this act as a rising situation in which;

military officers more or less overtly threaten to carry out a coup d’état unless specific demands are met, when they stage an unsuccessful coup, when a coup brings about or prevents the replacement of the government by another group of civilians, and, most importantly, when the officers themselves take control of the government.”¹²

Nordlinger’s definition brings into conversation some of the theoretical issues in civil-military relations. In the generic sense, civil-military relations are hinged on two fundamental issues: the extent to which civilian authority exerts its influence on military matters to determine politically vested outcomes and the extent to which military interference in civilian authority produces attendant consequences. There are three distinct categories of praetorian militaries: the ruler, the guardian, and the moderator. These categories reflect situational circumstances, the nature of civil-military relations in a specific state, and political opportunities. Regarding the ‘ruler’ category, the military seeks regime dominance by seizing political power. The strategic objective is to modify and align a state’s political life with the interests of the military by bringing about fundamental changes in its power distribution structures by eliminating or neutralising all existing centres of power.¹³ This is an indictment and vote of no confidence in civilian political leadership by the military. Mietzner says, ‘The military is the main component of the regime, and all other forces and institutions are under its control.’¹⁴ The executive, legislature, and judiciary are directly occupied by members of the armed forces or by loyalist civilians.

The guardian, also called the ‘arbitrator’ model, is symptomatic of a breakdown in the social contract between the state and society. Rising political challenges from the civilians' lack of confidence in the state often lead to military intervention in the affairs of the state by a professional and apolitical praetorian army. Its ideological thrust seeks to impose a time frame on military rule while facilitating a political transition to an acceptable civilian government. This type is distinct in its self-interpreting societal needs without a vibrant political framework that creates political equilibria. Arguably, this type of praetorian military may assume the role of a kingmaker, adjudicating political contestation among diverse political groups and becoming influential in conferring power to one of them. The moderator type is highly political in vetoing, sanctioning, and indicting a civilian government in the event of disrupting a political status quo aligned with its interests.¹⁵ Alterations in a state's political, economic, and social life compel this type of military to intervene on the side of the government or against it by manipulating processes such as elections and political transitions to maintain or return to the status quo.

⁹ Peter D Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control,” *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996): 149–78.

¹⁰ Dylan Yanano Mangani and Edwin Yingyi, “Praetorianism and Political Transitions in Lesotho: A Critique of the Lesotho Military,” in *Military, Politics and Democratization in Southern Africa: The Quest for Political Transition* (Springer, 2023), 21–35.

¹¹ Valerij Shpak, “Indirect Praetorianism: The Case of Turkey’s Military,” *Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces* 206, no. 4 (2022): 624–38.

¹² Eric A Nordlinger, “Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments,” (*No Title*), 1977.

¹³ Shpak, “Indirect Praetorianism: The Case of Turkey’s Military.”

¹⁴ Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control.”

¹⁵ Mangani and Yingyi, “Praetorianism and Political Transitions in Lesotho: A Critique of the Lesotho Military.”

EMERGENCE OF A PRAETORIAN MILITARY IN ZIMBABWE: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

Morris Janowitz's theory presents how ideological, social, and cultural values compete and at times overlap, creating public causes and crises in which the military covertly or overtly becomes a stakeholder in a given society. Since its political independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean military's engagement with the country has been a history of flows and ebbs revolving around its purpose of exploiting and engineering politico-economic and social opportunities while manipulating challenges in the country to establish its pre-eminence, reap economic benefits, and revive the ruling ZANU-PF political fortunes. Having started under the Mugabe regime in 1980, Zimbabwe's military praetorianism occurred against a background of existential security problems, which made the army the site and source of the regime's security framework.¹⁶ This is to argue that a civilian-military conundrum emerged in which the country was beset by the insurmountable legacies of its war of liberation and the political consequences, the general mistrust between competing former liberation movements, ZAPU and ZANU and the destabilising apartheid South Africa. These political realities created strange circumstances in which the posture of the ruling ZANU was often influenced by its perceptions and management of security threats and how it navigated its interests against those of the political opposition, ZAPU. In this political climate, the Mugabe government enacted pieces of security legislation and other security measures, which included the instrumentalisation of the Zimbabwean army, thereby designating the country under a state of emergency. This was pursuant to what the Zimbabwean regime argued as odd circumstances that required emergency powers dispensation.¹⁷ Of interest was the ruling ZANU's deterrence strategy, informed by a mixture of factors which included ZAPU's historical contribution towards the country's liberation struggle leading to animosity between the two liberation movements and the subsequent discovery of arms cache on properties belonging to ZAPU in 1982, leading to a momentous shift in the country's security configuration in which the Mugabe government coalesced with the military as a subservient and extension of the ruling party to curtail the opposition.

ZANU's deterrent strategy mirrored some of the key components in civil-military relations discourse, which focuses on the nature of military relations with society. Praetorian militaries are highly politicised and tend to view societies as sites for political contestation while their political objective is to uphold a specific political status quo. Fearing the loss of its pre-eminence in claiming elements of Zimbabwe's nationalist history, ZANU branded ZAPU as an existential threat and enemy of the Zimbabwean people. It was widely believed that the ruling ZANU and its military wing the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) that formed the bulk of the post-independent national army, had a deep sense of responsibility to fashion a 'coherent socialist ideology' influenced by their role in the liberation struggle while disavowing ZAPU and its military wing, the Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA)'s contribution.¹⁸ These culminated in state-sanctioned military skirmishes and operations that seemingly underpinned military security dimensions in the state's dealings with opposition. The effect was to label the opposition an enemy, thus downplaying unique historical events, realities, and facts about the role played by various political actors and movements before and after Zimbabwe's independence. These distinct political identities mutated into differences between the state and the opposition. Of importance were the effects of the discovery of the arms cache, that led to the confiscation of properties of ZIPRA under the Forfeiture of the Enemy Property Act. The effects were profound, leading to the freezing of accounts of companies in which former ZIPRA combatants had invested, and the consequences were that most of these soldiers lost their sources of livelihood.¹⁹ Their dissatisfaction not only led to their mass desertion from the Zimbabwean army but also birthed dissidents who sought to correct the political situation with the support of the South African government. Far from deserting the army, the dissidents embarked on a terror campaigns that led to mutilations, kidnapping, and murder. The tensions escalated when internecine violence and skirmishes infiltrated Zimbabwe's military barracks in Connemara,

¹⁶ Timothy Lewis Scarnecchia, *Race and Diplomacy in Zimbabwe: The Cold War and Decolonization, 1960–1984*, vol. 157 (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

¹⁷ Alao, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe*.

¹⁸ Mangani and Yingyi, "Praetorianism and Political Transitions in Lesotho: A Critique of the Lesotho Military."

¹⁹ Mawere Munyaradzi and Ngonidzashe Marongwe, *The End of an Era? Robert Mugabe and a Conflicting Legacy* (African Books Collective, 2018).

Entumbane, and Chitungwiza, prompting an inevitable response from the Mugabe regime and ultimately involving the military, culminating in the Gukuruhundi massacres of the early 1980s.

The case studies of Zimbabwe's interventions in the crises in Mozambique from 1980 to 1983 and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) under the banner of Pan-Africanism and African solutions to African problems depicted some of the competing and at times overlapping declared and implied reasons influenced by a complex web of politico-military vested interests. In both interventions, the declared interests were that the insurgency fermented by the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) in Mozambique and Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) in the DRC were potentially subversive and destructive of African sovereignty.^{20,21} This was against countervailing evidence that depicted a corporatist and praetorian Zimbabwean army whose intervention implied a politico-entrepreneurship disguised under the banner of African solidarity cooperation, exploited the two countries for commercialism. Praetorian militaries are rational and purposeful, often identifying, developing, and pursuing political and economic objectives by taking advantage of conflicts in hotspots to control either political or economic structures in those regions. In Mozambique, the declared interests of the Mugabe regime were echoed in an African camaraderie response to a security crisis in which the Mozambican government was under siege because of RENAMO. Thus, while commemorating the untimely death of Mozambique's founding father, Samora Machel, Mugabe retorted that:

[I]n no case shall Zimbabwe allow the MNR [Renamo] to take full control of Mozambique. The defence of Mozambique's sovereignty is the defence of Zimbabwe's sovereignty, for if the present Mozambican Government's sovereignty is anyway overthrown, so shall our own.²²

Mugabe's statement spoke to the revival of liberation politics in post-independent Zimbabwe-Mozambique relations, in which the Zimbabwean military's philosophy was rooted in a moral appeal couched in the liberation struggle memory between the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and its counterpart, ZANU. The implied interests were to secure all the economic interests vital to Zimbabwe's economy in Mozambique, at risk of being destroyed by RENAMO. The Mozambican military intervention would avert RENAMO's attacks on strategic pipelines and routes along the Beira and Maputo corridors while the Zimbabwean and Mozambican governments set up the Zimbabwe-Mozambique Friendship Association (ZIMOFA).²³ This became an economic aid assistance program run by the Zimbabwean military to assist Mozambicans reeling from RENAMO's politico-military activities. Akin to moderator praetorian militaries that emerge in political and economic distress and intervene either to protect or indict a regime, the Zimbabwean military spearheaded ZIMOFA as a political strategy to depict its role in Mozambique's nationwide reconstruction drive. The vital message was that Zimbabwe's military embarked on a substantial economic aid blueprint aimed at undoing RENAMO's carnage. Such aid initiatives found purchase among FRELIMO sympathisers and those who had become weary of the protracted civil war. Such political activities by the Zimbabwean military created a fertile ground for depicting Zimbabwe as the architect of reconstruction and peace in Mozambique while politically castigating RENAMO as an enemy of the state. Consequently, senior Zimbabwean military officials were deployed to run this blueprint, suggesting how its military became an integral part of policymaking during this period.

Zimbabwe's intervention in the DRC was legitimised under Article 5 (3) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which prescribes interventions in the case of reasonable grounds for threats to peace and security within the region. Leadership response to the conflict that broke out in the DRC in 1998 between the Kabila regime and opposing rebels fell largely to Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola, who resorted to military intervention as a clarion call within the pedigrees of multilateralism and Pan-Africanism.²⁴ Beneath these African monickers lay an intricate and powerful corporate web depicting

²⁰ Annette Seegers, "Revolutionary Armies of Africa: Mozambique and Zimbabwe," in *Military Power and Politics in Black Africa* (Routledge, 2021), 129–65.

²¹ Seegers, Annette. "Revolutionary Armies of Africa: Mozambique and Zimbabwe." In *Military Power and Politics in Black Africa*, pp. 129-165. Routledge, 2021.

²² Alao, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe*.

²³ Alao, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe*.

²⁴ Patrick Dzimiri, "African Multilateral Responses to the Crisis in Zimbabwe: A Responsibility to Protect Perspective," *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 39, no. 2 (2017).

the Zimbabwean army as politico-military entrepreneurs under the banner of regional solidarity that exploited the Congo in resource colonialism. This argument lends weight to the 2002 United Nations Security Council (UNSC)'s findings on the Zimbabwean military's commercialism in the Congolese conflict.²⁵ The report's findings were that an entrepreneurial merger known as SOCEBO, between COSLEG, a Zimbabwean military company and Congo's Comiex, was given a lucrative timber deal by the Kabila regime in exchange for security guarantees and to cover for Zimbabwe's human and financial losses in supporting the Congolese government against the Rwandan and Ugandan-backed rebels. The report further fingered senior military figures within the Zimbabwean military hierarchical structures that included Brigadier General Sibusiso Busi Moyo, the Director General of COSLEG, who would later become a beneficiary of the 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe, Air Commodore Mike Tichafa Karakadzai, Deputy Secretary of COSLEG, directing policy and procurement and Colonel Simpson Sikhulile Nyathi, the Director of defence policy for COSLEG.²⁶

Far from the human and financial implications of an unbudgetted military adventurism in the DRC, the Zimbabwean military intervention had profound regional consequences. The rationale among the Zimbabwean foreign policy establishment, which included the military elites, was that resource colonialism of the Congo would naturally recoup Zimbabwe's financial losses. Although the continued presence of Zimbabwe's military opened doors to vast diamond mining concessions and timber, the presence simultaneously undermined the 1999 Lusaka Peace Process predicated on the exit of foreign forces from the Congolese soil, whose presence contributed largely to the conflict. Zimbabwe's politico-military entrepreneurship in the DRC became a source of conflict because of the basic tenets of military praetorianism. Praetorian militaries are embedded in a zero-sum relationship with societies.²⁷ In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the continued presence and access to mineral wealth outweighed the loss of life of the civilian population. This reasoning was clarified by the UNSC 2002 report, which depicts the Zimbabwean military role as asymmetrical and transactional during the conflict. While providing security guarantees for the Kinshasa government in the form of air and road transport logistics, military supplies, and defense, this allowed the Zimbabwean military access to the Tremalt cobalt and copper deal, and diamond mining operation in Kalobo in Kasai.

A significant aspect of Zimbabwe's military intervention in the DRC is how the conflict in the DRC was instrumentalised by the Mugabe regime to manage a politico-security dilemma in Zimbabwe at the time. A combination of a poorly mismanaged economy, a seething socio-economic crisis, and the consequential emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 threatened to unseat the Mugabe regime. Instrumentally, the DRC crisis not only became an external source of revenue for the Mugabe regime but also a stable economic incentive to buy security guarantees from the Zimbabwean military.²⁸ Such an arrangement between the Mugabe regime and the military falls into the praetorian military theology. Moderator praetorian militaries emerge when their socio-economic and political lifeline is threatened in praetorian societies. They thus intervene to protect a regime or pass a vote of no confidence in it by manipulating political processes such as political transitions or electoral cycles to maintain or return to the political and socio-economic status quo.

ZIMBABWE'S PRAETORIAN MILITARY, 2000-2008

The onset of the new millennium in 2000 was earmarked by Zimbabwe's Afroradical socio-economic transformation underpinned by a land reform program whose ideological thrust was a complete decolonisation project by returning land to African natives. Its ramifications were multifold, renewing debates on citizenship and belonging in which white commercial farmers were caricatured as settlers and aliens, while at regional levels, the African continent heralded Zimbabwe's land reform as a progressive step towards social justice, human dignity and resource distribution—the very markers of African identity.²⁹

²⁵ Paul Asiimwe, "Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law* 22, no. 2 (2004): 194–200.

²⁶ Esau Ncube, *Robert Mugabe, KCB: Black Supremacist* (Xlibris Corporation, 2020).

²⁷ Ana Magdalena Figueroa, *The Impact of Foreign Interventions on Democracy and Human Rights* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022).

²⁸ Tarugarira, "The Military and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1970s to 2018."

²⁹ David Mhlanga and Emmanuel Ndhlovu, "Socio-Economic and Political Challenges in Zimbabwe and the Development Implications for Southern Africa," *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 2 (2021): 75–98.

This also coincided with the emergence of an organic crisis whose morbid symptoms included a political system and state institutions that lost credibility and legitimacy among the population, and policy miscalculations by the Zimbabwean state, leading to inflation and the crash of the Zimbabwean dollar. The consequences were the growth of the MDC as an alternative to ZANU-PF, The implications lay in the possibility of a ZANU-PF electoral loss, which would significantly alter the status quo. In view of that, the Zimbabwean military emerged as a moderator praetorian military whose political objectives sought to retain ZANU-PF's political lifeline and the status quo by militarising governance structures, militarising Zimbabwe's electoral cycles and playing a critical role in the state's socio-economic programs during this period.

A few weeks before Zimbabwe's June 2000 parliamentary elections, Lieutenant Colonel Chancellor Diye, the spokesperson for the Zimbabwean military, indicated the military's impartiality in the elections and its willingness to be subordinate to civilian authority in the event of regime change. The electoral results were a colossal defeat for the ruling ZANU-PF. While ZANU-PF retained power, this occurred against a background of a rising opposition, while its electoral pre-eminence was significantly reduced, with which the MDC garnered 57 of the 120 seats in parliament. A paradigm shift in which the Zimbabwean military began to view elections with new security thinking emerged, leading to a momentous change in Zimbabwe's security configuration. This was followed by the 2002 statement by then Zimbabwe Defense Forces chief Vitalis Zvinavashe that the military was an exclusive political entity that was partisan and gravitating towards endorsing a national leader whose ideology was in sync with the liberation struggles ethos. Zvinavashe said:

To this end, let it be known that the highest office in the land [the presidency] is a straitjacket whose occupant is expected to observe the objectives of the liberation struggle. We will, therefore, not accept, let alone support or salute, anyone with a different agenda that threatens the very existence of our sovereignty.³⁰

The statement exposed a military-party-state conflation in which the military elite had become partisan in placing a political premium on ZANU-PF's survival by its exclusive recognition and conferring of legitimacy on a political leader who possessed liberal struggle credentials, as a criterion for governance. This argument cements the view that praetorian militaries are purposeful and political actors who are locomotives in manipulating the political and socio-economic correlation of forces in a given society in support of or against a political party or leader. To conclude the analysis of the Zimbabwean military involvement politically on its partisan nature is to reproduce long-standing and limited literature and its traditional avoidance of the praetorian nature of the military. Although the Zimbabwean military became involved in the 2002, 2005, and 2008 elections, this was fuelled by what is termed as "preponderance of incumbency" that merged ideology and patronage. This refers to the military's preference for ZANU-PF based on the values of the liberation struggle while being rewarded with huge financial rewards, retirement packages and political elevations to the ruling party and state institutions. In various instances, the military was deployed to manage Zimbabwe's elections and one such instance is the setting up of the National Elections Command Centre at Manyame Air Base next to Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport.³¹ Some of the military personnel deployed to the centre included Air Vice Marshall Abu Basutu and Brigadier Mike Sango, who were later awarded ambassadorial posts. The implications of the military's involvement in the country's plebiscite were profound in that they attracted an ideological position in which the military's role was to defend the country's sovereignty and the political ethos of a liberation struggle against a latter-day political opposition deemed to work in cahoots with foreign powers. Praetorian militaries are often political, portraying themselves as agent whose power and scope seek to self-interpret the needs of their societies. They believe in their role in preserving the political and ideological status quo in societies, such allows for their narrowed definition of national interests.

It is plausible at this stage that the Zimbabwean military's deliberate support for Mugabe and their disparagement for a leader without a liberation struggle is rooted in their depiction of the MDC as a political stooge of Western powers and the role of the media in creating internal insecurity and

³⁰ Lisa Ruhanen et al., "Trends and Patterns in Sustainable Tourism Research: A 25-Year Bibliometric Analysis," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 23, no. 4 (2015): 517–35.

³¹ Knox Chitiyo, "The Case for Security Sector Reform in Zimbabwe," *London: Royal United Services Institute*, 2009.

despondency. In their military-societal relations, these militaries tend to adopt a zero-sum game approach.³² Akin to this was the 2002 Zimbabwean presidential elections in which reports of human rights abuses, abductions, torture and disappearance of the opposition became commonplace. It is often argued that the Zimbabwean military is the ruling party's electoral pulse through a variety of measures, which include eliminating political competition and theatres of political competition.

In March 2008, Zimbabwe held its presidential elections in which the incumbent Robert Mugabe garnered 43,2% of the total votes against Morgan Tsvangirai's 47,9% and Simba Makoni's 8%. The results necessitated a run-off as none of the candidates scored above the minimal threshold. Leadership response to the election stalemate fell largely to the Zimbabwean military, whose interpretation of elections as a culmination of political sieges that created a security conundrum in the event of a ZANU-PF electoral loss. Mugabe's defeat at the March 2008 elections not only threatened the status quo but also national security, in which the June 2008 electoral run-off became an ideological contest between the bullet and the ballot. Such security thinking culminated in the creation of the Joint Operations Command (JOC), an organ comprising senior and elite chiefs from Zimbabwe's security cluster, including the airforce, police, intelligence, army and prison services. The rationale of the JOC's involvement in the elections was to reproduce ZANU-PF's political power at the polls while depicting the military not as an appendage to the state but as a powerful and parallel governing structure within the state.³³ This confirms El-Shimmy's argument that praetorian militaries often depict themselves as distinct political agent whose scope of power seeks to resist changes and threats to the status quo.³⁴ To achieve this, violence became interlaced in the weeks leading up to the presidential run-off, with the military engaging in political strategies such as 'Operation Makavhotera papi', which translates to 'Who did you vote for? In this contending climate, political issues were often met with military strategies in Zimbabwe's provinces. The ideological thrust of the military's involvement was to create and fashion a civilian populace beholden to ZANU-PF's political ideas. This led international and local observers concerned about democracy, human rights and governance to condemn the run-off, bemoaning colossal evidence of human rights abuses, torture and killings of civilians, electoral fraud and engineering, and a general breakdown in the social contract between the state and society. Though this strategy paid off for Mugabe and ZANU-PF, it occurred against despondency and a lack of political goodwill among regional bodies, leading to a power-sharing agreement between Mugabe and Tsvangirai in 2009.

Apart from the militarisation of politics, the impact of Zimbabwe's socio-economic crisis manifested in the militarisation of governance in the country. Illiberal democracies often emerge when civilian authority coalesces with the military in running the state. According to Feaver, such conditions happen to result from structural challenges in a country's political economy, to be specific, failing democratic systems and institutions, illegitimate civilian governments, incapacitated civilian governments and repeated cycles in which militaries are politicised instrumentally to manage political crises in regimes.³⁵ With Zimbabwe's elections depicted as political sieges, the failing economy and a breakdown in the social contract between the state and its population, a window of opportunity emerged in which the military yielded much power within the state, leading to what has been denoted as 'military commercialism.'³⁶ This is in reference to how Mugabe strategically deployed senior military officers to state parastatals as shareholders, chief executive officers, directors and board members. Military commercialism is a rising situation in which senior army figures are deployed to state institutions for narrow financial gains or in exchange for providing security guarantees to the incumbent regime. Far from an unprecedented free fall of the Zimbabwean dollar, food and medical supplies shortages and other unexplained ills, the socio-economic crisis in the country also heralded critical skills flight as most qualified Zimbabweans left the country in search of greener pastures. In the absence of such critical skills,

³² Simon Badza, "Zimbabwe's 2008 Elections and Their Implications for Africa," *African Security Studies* 17, no. 4 (2008): 1–16.

³³ Daniel Gallagher and Lisa R. Grimm, "Making an Impact: The Effects of Game Making on Creativity and Spatial Processing," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 28 (June 2018): 138–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2018.05.001>.

³⁴ Yasser El-Shimy, "A Model of Praetorian States," *Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Middle East Initiative Working Paper* 1 (2016).

³⁵ Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control."

³⁶ Gordon Moyo, "The Curse of Military Commercialism in State Enterprises and Parastatals in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42, no. 2 (2016): 351–64.

the military filled the gaps with some senior army figures, such as retired Lieutenant General Mike Nyambuya appointed as Zimbabwe's Energy and Power Development Minister in the mid-2000s.³⁷ Other appointments included that of retired Brigadier Ambrose Mutinhiri, who became the country's Youth Development and Gender Minister; Major General Edzai Chimonyo served as Zimbabwe's ambassador to Tanzania, with others such as Air Commodore Mike Karakadzai, who assumed the role of General Manager of Zimbabwe's National Railways.

CONCLUSION

The praetorian military has evolved since 1980 in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean military has pursued an approach with a society that enforces substantial political, social, and economic constraints, thereby undermining the constitutionalism and democratic principles that previously characterised the nation as the 'African jewel'. In several instances between 1980 and 2008, the ruling ZANU-PF's articulation and conception of civil-military relations, and its conception of security threats, led to the partisan willingness of the Zimbabwean military to become a potent tool of the ruling party. This argument gives weight to how, at different decisive political epochs, the distinctions between national security and regime threats were blurred, leading to a modification of Zimbabwe's security posture in which the Mugabe regime instrumentally used the military to neutralise its perceived political enemies. At the end of the 1990s, political crises abroad and locally, such as in the DRC and the emergence of a formidable political opposition created opportunities through which the Zimbabwean military became politico-military-entrepreneurship under the banner of defending the sovereignty of the DRC and managing political opposition. Not only did the crisis in the Congo allow the Zimbabwean military access to mineral wealth, but the emergence of the opposition in Zimbabwe allowed the military to provide security guarantees for the Mugabe regime in exchange for financial perks and opportunities within the state.

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