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A Militarized Election The 27 June Presidential Run-off

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Introduction

In this chapter we seek to dissect the second tale of the 2008 elections, the 27 June presidential run-off election. Chapter 4 discussed the key features and actors in the 29 March harmonized elections that, by most accounts, were reasonably free and fair and produced plausible results. Though there were petitions filed by both ZANU(PF) and the MDC-T challenging some of the results, the 29 March election results have been recognized as representing the genuine expression of the voluntary will of the people. Those results – especially the parliamentary results – were subsequently adopted as the benchmark and formula for the allocation of executive power under the 15 September 2008 power-sharing agreement.

This chapter demonstrates the brazenly intrusive and expansive role of the military/security complex in the run-off election and the consequent omnipresent fear that enveloped the whole country. The systemic violence and intimidation was so intense as to force one of the presidential candidates to withdraw, paving the way for a one-horse election. The run-off election degenerated into a typical Zimbabwean election, one without a choice.

The oddities of Zimbabwe's run-off election

As is evident in Greg Linington's contribution, the law provided for a 'second election'¹ to decide the presidency in the event that the first election

¹ This second presidential election came to be referred to as the 'run-off' election, a usage that we adopt in this book.

proved inconclusive, i.e. with no candidate obtaining 50 per cent +1 of the valid votes. The law also provided for 21 days for such a presidential run-off to be conducted after the first election.² Zimbabwe's run-off election, however, was marked by several peculiarities. First, this was the first time in the history of elections in both pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe that the country was holding a run-off. In previous presidential elections, Mugabe would romp to victory, though very controversially in respect of the 2002 presidential election when he won by 56 per cent of the vote to Tsvangirai's 42 per cent.³ In addition, Mugabe did not even consider a run-off, let alone coming second to his long-time adversary. After casting his vote on 29 March, Mugabe said a second round would not be necessary as he was going to knock out all his opponents and conquer them in the first round:

We are not used to boxing matches where we go from round one to round two. We just knock each other out. That's how we have done it in the past. That's how we will do it this time.

It's a constitutional requirement that there may be a re-run, but it won't be necessary.⁴

The second peculiarity was the inordinate delay in announcing the results of the first round presidential election held on 29 March; the results were frozen for five weeks, well beyond the timeline for holding the run-off election. A third oddity was the time it took after the announcement of results on 2 May to announce the run-off date. When the date was finally announced on 16 May, it was two days after the government had first extended the period for the second round election from 21 days to 90 days after the announcement of results. Due to a combination of all the above, it is virtually impossible to determine when the presidential run-off campaign actually started. However, it appears fair to suggest that it began as soon as ZANU(PF) got wind of the results, which must have been soon after 29 March, i.e. in early April.

For instance, on 3rd April, long before the results of the presidential election had been announced, the Deputy Information Minister said: 'ZANU(PF) is ready for a run-off, we are ready for a resounding victory.'

2 Legal controversy erupted as to when the first election ended and the 21 days began to take effect. Was it 21 days after voting day of 29 March, or 21 days after the announcement of the results on 2 May? The election body later decided to settle the matter unilaterally. On 14 May, a Special Government Gazette extended the period for the run-off election from 21 days to 90 days after the announcement of the results. Two days later, ZEC announced that the run-off would be held on 27 June 2008.

3 The controversy had several sources: the unequal electoral landscape, the partiality of the public media and election officials, the politicization of the electoral body, alleged rigging, and mismanagement of the voting process, especially the unfair distribution of polling stations between urban areas (Tsvangirai's stronghold) and rural areas (the heartland of Mugabe's support.).

4 'Mugabe confident no need for a re-run,' *The Sunday Mail*, 30 March 2008.

In terms of strategy, we only applied 25 percent of our energy into this campaign. ... (the re-run) is when we are going to unleash the other 75 percent that we did not apply in the first case.⁵

Then on 4 April, 2008 the ZANU(PF) Politburo held an extraordinary meeting that sought among other things to carry out a post-mortem of what in law was still an incomplete election process and plan a way forward. After the meeting, ZANU(PF) Secretary for Administration, Didymus Mutasa, announced that the party had decided that Mugabe would participate in a run-off. 'It's definite there will be a re-run. We are down but not out', he said and added: 'Absolutely, the candidate will be Robert Gabriel Mugabe – who else would it be other than our dear old man?'⁶ This shocked many people who strongly suspected that ZANU(PF) had gained advance knowledge of the results and the defeat of its presidential candidate and therefore was already planning for a run-off.

Further, on the very day the ZANU(PF) Politburo was meeting, veterans of Zimbabwe's guerrilla war were marching through the capital; according to Sapa-AP, 'while they were silent, there was little doubt they were out to intimidate President Robert Mugabe's political opponents.'⁷ This chapter reflects on how the winds of democratic change were defied, paying particular attention to the leading role of the military/security sector in this process.

The military/security factor in the run-off election

The April to June 2008 election interregnum was a militarized moment. A ZANU(PF) that had been de-stooled as the ruling party in parliament was not prepared to be dislodged from State House. A pivotal player in the militarized elections was the Joint Operations Command (JOC), a military/security body comprising the heads of all security organs (army, air force, prison service, intelligence, and police) which, according to Jocelyn Alexander and Blessing Miles Tendi, 'decided within days of the (29 March) election to deploy a strategy of delay and violence in order to hold onto the all-important executive'.⁸

The militarization of the 27 June election was part of the militarization of the state that had started several years before with the onset of what ZANU(PF) and the government termed the 'third Chimurenga', a reference to the often violent take-over of white-owned farms from 2000 onwards.

5 'Robert Mugabe emerges as Zimbabwe 'crackdown' begins', the *Daily Telegraph* (UK), 7 April 2008.

6 'Robert Mugabe will contest Zimbabwe presidential run-off', *ibid.* 7 April 2008.

7 'War veterans march, Zimbabwe opposition factions vow to work together for possible runoff', Sapa-AP, 4 April 2008

8 Jocelyn Alexander and Blessing Miles Tendi, 'A Tale of Two Elections: Zimbabwe at the Polls in 2008', *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin*, No. 80, Winter 2008.

This metamorphosed into a ‘governance-by-operations’ militaristic style of policy implementation. Alexander and Tendi note that since 2000,

Zimbabwe’s state has been described as increasingly ‘militarised’, with military men being appointed in key positions throughout the state, and an expanding range of decisions and actions being taken by the military, from political strategy to the formulation and implementation of agrarian and economic policy.⁹

The increasing penetration of the military/security sector is closely associated with the party-state phenomenon. In practice, a party-state means the ruling party is fused to the state; party and state structures at all levels are conflated. Moreover, in the party-state duality, the party is supreme over the state. All formal organs of the state – including the military and security services – are closely linked to the party without being officially integrated into it. Bratton and Masunungure characterize the Zimbabwe case as a ‘politicised party-state’.¹⁰

The militarization of Zimbabwe politics in the service of the ruling party became evident at the turn of the millennium and towards the June 2000 parliamentary elections. Some commentators then were already alluding to this militarization. For instance, constitutional expert and activist Brian Kagoro was perturbed by ‘early signs of militarisation, orchestrated by the government’ while academic Brian Raftopoulos was more categorical:

...it is quite clear that President Robert Mugabe’s real strength is the coercion which comes out of the army and the liberation war veterans. He is using it to the full and the militarisation will be to his benefit even if the opposition does well in any elections which might take place.¹¹

To Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure, the year 2000 ‘was a turning point in civil-military relations. With the emergence of the MDC challenge, the military’s involvement in political life became increasingly open’.¹² The militarization of the state took the form of a growing number of senior military officers being appointed to lead strategic state institutions including the Zimbabwe Prisons Service (ZPS) the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), and parastatals such as the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM), the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and The Department of National Parks and Wildlife.

In their analysis of Zimbabwe’s blocked democracy, Bratton and Masunungure characterize Mugabe’s post-independence regime as ‘a militarized form of electoral authoritarianism’ which has come to rest on ‘the interpen-

9 Ibid.

10 Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure, ‘Zimbabwe’s Long Agony’, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 19. No. 4, 2008, p. 44.

11 Quoted in Alex Duval Smith, ‘Parliament dissolved as “creeping coup” looms’, *The Independent* (UK), 12 April 2008.

12 Bratton and Masunungure, ‘Zimbabwe’s Long Agony’, p. 48.

etration of two key organs of authority: the ruling party and the security forces.’ This perspective can be extended to the analysis of Zimbabwe’s two elections. This chapter argues that both ‘organs of authority’ were important in the two elections but that their visibility and significance differed fundamentally between them. In the lead up to the March elections, it was the party – as was the case in previous elections – that played a critical and prominent role in the campaign while the military and other security branches played a background, more-or-less subdued, and more rhetorical than physical role. ZANU(PF) fought for power against its opposition rivals and did so more or less politically. The political leadership of the regime campaigned for power and did so without directly and physically bringing the men and women in uniform into the fray. The military leadership of the regime occasionally revealed its partisan sympathies but there was no wholesale and systematic political mobilization of the security/military sectors as institutions. It can thus be fairly asserted that the march to the 29 March elections was a political march and not a military march. The campaign was a political campaign; though the military/security may have lurked rather menacingly in the background, their claws remained sheathed.

Unlike the pre-29 March period, the campaign afterwards was a visibly militarized one. The security forces, rather than the ruling party, were in the forefront, spearheading the march to the 27 June run-off. Available evidence suggests that the governing regime came to the conclusion that the party had failed in the march to 29 March and therefore that military should lead the march to 27 June. Here is how the ZANU(PF) president described his party’s 29 March performance when he addressed the party’s Central Committee in mid-May:

We went to the elections completely unprepared. We went to the elections completely unprepared, unorganised and this against an election-weary voter. Our structures went to sleep, were deep in slumber in circumstances of an all-out war.

[The structures] were passive; they were lethargic, ponderous, divided, diverted, disinterested, demobilised or simply non-existent. It was terrible to see the structures of so embattled a ruling party so enervated.

As leaders, we all share the blame: from the national level to that of the branch chairman. We played truant; we did not lead, we misled; we did not encourage, rather we discouraged; we did not unite, we divided; we did not inspire, we dispirited; we did not mobilise, we demobilised. Hence the dismal result we are landed with (‘Unite for victory: President.’)¹³

Prior to this rare, candid and public declaration of the ‘dismal’ performance of the party, Mugabe was reported to have told his ZANU(PF) Politburo in early April 2008 that in order to win the presidential election run-off, the party must establish a warlike and military-style leadership to campaign for him. The *Zimbabwe Independent* quoted one of the documents as follows:

¹³ *The Herald*, 17 May 2008.

[Mugabe] said the party must establish an almost military/warlike leadership which will deliver. The president and first secretary said the party must mobilise massively to achieve a resounding victory in the run-off. He said party members must understand this was a sink-or-swim election.¹⁴

Mugabe is said to have come up with this 'warlike' strategy after meeting his JOC advisors before the April Politburo meeting. The import of this was to reduce the run-off contest to a battle between the bullet and the ballot. In this battle, ZANU(PF) was making it starkly clear that in its political world, the bullet is supreme and the ballot is subservient to it. This philosophical line dates back three decades to when, in 1976, the ZANU president and ZANLA commander-in-chief articulated his party's militaristic conception of the source of political authority:

...our votes must go together with our guns; after all any vote ... shall have been the product of the gun. The gun, which provides the votes, should remain its security officer, its guarantor.¹⁵

This thinking is itself the supreme vitiation of elections as an expression of democratic choice because if the ballot produces a result that is incongruent with the expectations of the gun-wielders, then the bullet will shred the ballot. For ZANU(PF), elections are a continuation of war by other means. A senior army officer made this unambiguously clear in the run-up to the run-off when he publicly declared that ZANU(PF) captured power after a bitter and protracted war and would not surrender the country unless it was defeated by the MDC in a war. In the words of Major-General Engelbert Rugeje: 'This country came through the bullet, not the pencil. Therefore, it will not go by your X of the pencil.' Rugeje also chillingly promised his Masvingo audience of villagers that on his return after the vote, 'the helicopter will be full of bullets.'¹⁶ In the northern part of the country in Mashonaland West, soldiers reportedly handed out bullets to villagers and told them: 'If you vote for MDC in the presidential run-off election, you have seen the bullets; we have enough for each one of you, so beware.'¹⁷

Mugabe, the soldiers' Commander-in-Chief, endorsed this view. At one of his election rallies, he warned: 'We fought for this country, and a lot of blood was shed. We are not going to give up our country because of a mere X. How can a ballpoint fight with a gun?'¹⁸ Mugabe's Commander of the Defence Forces then put the matter to rest by predicting a resounding electoral triumph for his political boss: 'Our comrade, Defence Forces chief, our leader President Mugabe and comrade-in-arms will romp to victory.

¹⁴ 'Mugabe Orders "warlike" campaign', the *Zimbabwe Independent*, 23 May 2008.

¹⁵ Mugabe, R. *Our war of Liberation: Speeches, Articles, Interviews*. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1981, p. 100.

¹⁶ 'Politicians threaten to wage post-election war', *The Financial Gazette*, 19 June 2008.

¹⁷ 'Mugabe's brutality to force election victory revealed', *The Independent* (UK), 9 June 2008.

¹⁸ Robert Mugabe warns Zimbabwe's voters: 'How can a pen fight a gun?' *The Times*, 17 June 2008.

We say so because we have no apology to make to any house nigger and puppets.¹⁹

The military factor in the run-off election was so dominant and visible that to many critical observers, the military had covertly taken over and had become the arbiter of Zimbabwe's fate. There were reports of a 'military coup by stealth', with Mugabe being 'beholden to his senior generals to hold office' but more as the regime's titular leader.²⁰ A Human Rights Watch Zimbabwe specialist, Tiseke Kasambala, noted an 'increasing militarisation of the state' and that evidence pointed to 'an increasing role by the army in state affairs.' According to her, 'The army is no longer just in barracks, waiting to protect the country. The army is out there, taking a role in the day-to-day government of the country'.²¹ In early June 2008 Tsvangirai himself claimed that 'the country has witnessed a *de facto coup d'etat* and is now effectively run by a military junta.'²²

The period between 29 March and 27 June 2008 gave the strong impression that the ZDF were little more than ZANU(PF) in uniform. For instance, a month before the run-off election, Army Chief of Staff Major-General Martin Chedondo made this unambiguously clear when he addressed soldiers:

The Constitution says the country should be protected by voting and in the 27 June presidential election run-off pitting our defence chief, Cde Robert Mugabe, and Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC-T, we should, therefore, stand behind our Commander-in-Chief.

Soldiers are not apolitical. Only mercenaries are apolitical. We have signed and agreed to fight and protect the ruling party's principles of defending the revolution. If you have other thoughts, then you should remove that uniform.²³

As if not to be outdone by the gun-wielders, members of ZANU(PF)'s political class echoed the same militaristic sentiments, and just as chillingly. The then Finance Minister Samuel Mumbengegwi was reported to have equated an MDC victory with a declaration of war. Addressing school heads in Masvingo province, he admonished: 'This is up to you, if you want peace, you vote for us. If you vote for the MDC, we will go to war.' The same function was addressed by then Masvingo Resident Minister and Governor, Willard Chiwewe, who bluntly decreed that Zimbabweans had no choice but vote for ZANU(PF). 'This is a choice with no choice. It's either you vote for war or peace.'²⁴

More fundamentally, the above statements betray two radically differ-

¹⁹ 'President will win run-off poll hands down: Chiwenga', *The Herald*, 23 June 2008.

²⁰ 'Zimbabwean generals have taken Robert Mugabe's power', the *Daily Telegraph* (UK), 6 June 2008.

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'Zimbabwe Opposition Leader Says Country Run by Military', *Voice of America*, 10 June 2008.

²³ 'Rally behind President in runoff, soldiers told', *The Herald*, 31 May 2008.

²⁴ *The Financial Gazette*, 19 June 2008.

ent conceptions of the sources of power and legitimacy. In the ZANU(PF) political world, legitimacy and power flowed from the barrel of the gun – and also from God, in the case of Mugabe²⁵ – and not from the ballot. On the other hand, the MDC-T continued to invest faith in the ballot as the only viable source of power and legitimacy. The 27 June moment was therefore a contest between these two conceptions and, as it turned out, the ZANU(PF) conception ‘won’ the game.

The political environment: the reign of fear

By all accounts, the inter-election period was one of the most traumatic and abnormal political situations in the country. Richard Joseph’s observation in February 2008 that ‘the notion of an electoral process in Zimbabwe with Mugabe at the controls can only be described as Orwellian’²⁶ was more apt in respect of the run-off election. Terence Ranger sums up the ‘abnormal’ period:

It is hard to comprehend how abnormal the situation in Zimbabwe has been between the March and June elections. Zimbabwe has had no parliament although all the MPs have been elected. The new parliamentarians have not met to elect a Speaker. Several MDC MPs have been arrested on charges ranging from child abduction to organising violence; many others are in hiding. There have been no functioning city councils or mayors even though a full slate of councillors was elected in March. The elected councillors in Harare met on private premises and chose themselves a mayor, but the only – and terrible – result of that was that his wife was abducted and brutally killed. Not surprisingly, no mayors have been elected elsewhere. Zimbabwe cities have been ‘in commission.’ Zimbabwe has hardly had a functioning civil society. Its human rights bodies have been raided and all non-governmental organisations have been prevented from operating in rural areas. Journalists have been beaten, arrested and killed. Churches have been under pressure, as Mugabe has declared his desire to see every church answerable only to Zimbabweans leaders and committed to the Zimbabwean revolution.²⁷

The pre-election context is also well summarized by Craig Timberg:

In three months between the 29th March vote and the June 27 runoff election, ruling-party militias under the guidance of 200 senior army officers battered the Movement for Democratic Change, bringing the opposition party’s network of activists to the verge of oblivion. By election day, more than 80 opposition supporters were dead, hundreds were missing, thousands were injured and

25 A week before polling day, Mugabe declared that ‘only God’ could remove him from office and that the MDC ‘will never be allowed to rule this country – never ever.’ He was addressing a group of Bulawayo business people when he thundered: ‘Only God who appointed me will remove me – not the MDC, not the British.’ ‘Only God can oust me, Mugabe declares’, AFP, 21 June 2008.

26 Joseph, Richard, ‘Challenges of a “Frontier” Region’, in *Journal of Democracy*, 19, 2, April 2008, p. 105.

27 ‘Will normality return to Zimbabwe?’ *The East African* (Kenya) 7 July 2008.

hundreds of thousands were homeless. Morgan Tsvangirai, the party's leader, dropped out of the contest and took refuge in the Dutch Embassy.²⁸

Timberg revealed that the brutal campaign was code named CIBD, an acronym for Coercion, Intimidation, Beating, and Displacement. In fact, the vicious campaign went beyond CIBD to include murder. The campaign was code-named 'Operation Makavhotera Papi' (Operation Who Did You Vote For?). It began in the rural areas, and within them, in the three Mashonaland provinces of Mashonaland West, East and Central. Incidentally and ironically, these were ZANU(PF) strongholds. The party won sixteen of the eighteen House of Assembly seats in Mashonaland Central, its best performance country-wide. In Mashonaland East, ZANU(PF) won nineteen of the 23 contested House of Assembly seats and yet it recorded the highest level of violence. From Mashonaland the violence spread to other provinces and from the rural areas the violence spread to the urban centres. In a tragic sense, the whole country was unified, in violence, and its pattern was the same, indicating a central point of organization and execution.

The bloody crackdown was reportedly orchestrated and systematically executed by soldiers,²⁹ police, state security agents, ZANU(PF) militia and veterans of the liberation war. The violence took the form of intimidation, kidnapping, torture, arson and murder of opposition or suspected opposition leaders, activists and supporters.

Many domestic and international observers documented the horrors attendant on the run-off, where Zimbabwe was reduced to a Hobbesian state of nature, in which life became 'solitary, nasty, brutish and short'. Human Rights Watch captured the litany of sordid incidents in its June 2008 report:

There is overwhelming evidence that the organised pattern of abuses have been replicated throughout the provinces. In nearly all the areas affected by violence, victims and eyewitnesses told Human Rights Watch that it was usually conducted at night and was characterised by abductions, beatings and the looting and burning of huts and other property.

ZANU(PF) officials and 'war veterans' are beating and torturing suspected MDC activists and supporters in hundreds of base camps established across the provinces as local centres of operations. ZANU(PF) supporters, government officials, 'war veterans' and state security forces are conducting brutal daily 're-education' meetings in which they beat and at times torture local residents to force them to denounce the MDC and swear allegiance to ZANU(PF). Further, ZANU(PF) and its allies have gone on a campaign of widespread destruction

²⁸ The *Washington Post*, 5 July 2008.

²⁹ The Government denied involvement and instead blamed the MDC for instigating the violence. The military, for instance, issued a statement denying involvement: 'The Zimbabwe National Army wishes to raise concerns over articles being published in the print and electronic media on allegations relating to the alleged political violence, assaults, harassment and robberies perpetrated by men in army uniforms. The army categorically distances itself and any of its members from such activities' (IRIN, 'Zimbabwe: Hunger drives post-election violence, deepens poverty'. 9 May 2008).

of property and looting, including the burning of homesteads that has led to thousands of people being internally displaced. There has been a spate of abductions and killings of known MDC activists by suspected agents of the state, ZANU(PF) supporters and ‘war veterans’ in the province of Mashonaland East and Harare.³⁰

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), a local elections watchdog, was equally blunt:

When the results were finally released on 2 May 2008, it took almost two weeks to have the run-off date announced on 15 May 2008 during which the run up to the run-off degenerated into a run over leaving in its wake a trail of destruction, houses burnt down, many people displaced and homeless, many children orphaned, and community relations torn asunder. Freedom of assembly and movement were heavily restricted with rural areas virtually sealed off from opposition rallies, the opposition leadership subjected to sporadic arrests and detentions, their campaign activities under total blackout on national electronic and press media. Hate speech, incitement of violence, and threats of war characterized electoral campaigns, with the ruling party presidential candidate threatening to go back to war if he lost the election to the MDC presidential candidate, whom he considered a puppet of the West.³¹

The observations by ZESN were confirmed by field reports from other domestic observers, notably the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), a much respected defender and advocate of human rights and social justice dating back to before independence. The CCJP was one of the organizations that decided to observe the run-off election but ‘under protest’ given the unpropitious conditions obtaining in the post-harmonized elections period.

The following field observations from CCJP graphically capture some of aspects of the pre-election environment:

The June 27 run-off election was characterised by a wave of intimidation, torching of houses, beatings, abductions, ceaseless meetings and many other forms of violence. The pre-election period to this election left the people of Gokwe in total fear and psychological stress.

The MDC was not allowed in any form to hold a meeting or any form of gathering. If by any chance they attempt to meet, they (meetings) were either broken away by the Police, Army or the Zanu PF Youth Militia.

In some villages, people who were known to belong to the opposition had their names written down by kraal heads and ruling party leaders – for the purpose of identifying them and dealing with them later in form of murdering them or beating them, denying them food handouts and above all, as a threat (*CCJP: Diocese of Gokwe*).

This Pre-Presidential period (29 March to 27 June 2008) was the most violent

30 Human Rights Watch, “Bullets for Each of You”: State-sponsored Violence since Zimbabwe’s March 29 Elections’, New York, June 2008, p. 19.

31 ZESN, ‘Report on the Zimbabwe 29 March Harmonised Elections and 27 June Presidential Run-off’, Harare, August 2008, p. 9.

and bloody of all post-colonial elections that we have witnessed as an observer group. The most primitive and uncivilised methods and tactics were used in this supposedly modern day election.

Only ZANU PF rallies were witnessed throughout the Diocese. The rallies were not attended out of one's choice or free will. People were forced to go to rallies in all the rural areas of Masvingo.

Violence was intense. It was manifested in four major ways: intimidation, beatings, killings and arson. All forms of threats were used from verbal to physical threats. Youth (ZANU PF) and militia established bases which in other words could be termed as torture camps (*CCJP: Diocese of Masvingo*).

The superficial and negative peaceful environment that prevailed prior to the harmonised 29th March Election has been turned into a turmoil of direct and open violence, torture, beatings, arson, abductions, kidnapping and mass displacement, initiated and spearheaded by government agencies, security forces (military junta), war veterans, youths militias and Zanu PF supporters.

The period between March 29 2008 and June 27 2008, the date set for the run-off elections thus can be described as 'days of Armageddon' for the Zimbabwean populace (*CCJP: Manicaland*).

Two weeks before polling day, the CCJP was compelled to issue a stinging press statement on the pre-run-off environment.

The reign of violence that has been unleashed on the country, especially in the rural areas and former commercial farming areas, is unacceptable. Base camps from which militias terrorise defenceless rural populations must be disbanded as a matter of urgency. People are being force-marched to political re-orientation meetings and are told that they voted 'wrongly' in the Presidential poll on 29 March 2008 and that on 27 June 2008, they will be given the last opportunity to 'correct their mistake', else the full-scale shooting war of the 1970s will resume. It is in this context that despicable atrocities are being committed by members of both contesting parties, ZANU PF and MDC.³²

Many other observers – regional and international, friend and foe – of Zimbabwe's post-harmonized elections scene arrived at the same verdict. For instance, the Pan-African Parliament Observer Mission which arrived in the country on 14 June 2007 to observe the run-off warned that 'violence is at the top of the agenda of this electoral process' and that it had received 'many horrendous stories. The election is a far cry from what we had [in March].'³³ Tanzanian Foreign Minister Bernard Membe, speaking on behalf of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security lamented the dim prospects for a free and fair election: 'There is every sign that these elections will never be free nor fair.'³⁴

Across the Atlantic both the United States and the United Nations expressed their deep anxiety with Condoleezza Rice, then United States

32 Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, 'Press Statement on the Current Crisis in Our Country', 12 June 2008.

33 'Harare cuts back on election observers', the *Financial Times* (UK), 19 June 2008.

34 'Zimbabwe vote cannot be fair, say African ministers', Reuters, 19 June 2008.

Secretary of State, accusing the Mugabe regime of having given up ‘any pretence that the 27 June elections will be allowed to proceed in a free and fair manner’.³⁵ Five days before polling, the UN Security Council unanimously condemned the politically motivated violence: ‘The Security Council regrets that the campaign of violence and the restrictions on the political opposition have made it impossible for a free and fair election to take place on 27 June.’³⁶

The environment was such that Tsvangirai went into self-imposed exile for six weeks soon after the March 2008 elections for fear of assassination attempts.³⁷ He returned to Zimbabwe on 24 May but his campaign was consistently blocked or frustrated; he was arrested or detained on several occasions until he gave up the fight.

These were the conditions in which the run-off election was to be conducted. It is evident that the prevailing conditions were inimical to a fair, free and credible election. It should be noted that ZANU(PF) not only rejected allegations of state-instigated violence and its central role in it but actually blamed the MDC for the violence. Mugabe and his security chiefs constantly warned the MDC against perpetrating violence. Genocide Watch, a human rights group, calls this phenomenon ‘mirroring’ and describes it as ‘a strange but common psychological mechanism of denial used by mass murderers.’³⁸

For instance, in late May 2008, the Police Commissioner General Augustine Chihuri said: ‘The nation is facing a myriad of challenges and machinations by external forces and their internal sympathisers, who I normally call puppets. Its very existence and survival is threatened by these puppets and their handlers.’³⁹ But what motivated the ZANU(PF) regime to behave in the manner it did? Various explanations can be offered.

Towards explaining the scorched-earth campaign

As already noted, ZANU(PF) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since the watershed independence elections and its leader personally lost a presidential contest, coming second to his arch-rival Morgan Tsvangirai, the man he publicly despised for his modest education. Mugabe must have felt a sense of grievous personal loss and humiliation and his power base – the military/security establishment – also got angry on his behalf. The loss had to be avenged, and those who had caused it – the MDC in

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ ‘Security Council Urges Zimbabwe to Halt Violence’, the *New York Times*, 24 June 2008.

³⁷ Tsvangirai was a target of increasing criticism for staying out of the country while his supporters were attacked, tortured and killed.

³⁸ Quoted in ‘Violence approaching political mass murder’ <http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com>, 25 June 2008 (accessed 4/1/09).

³⁹ ‘MDC chief tallies cost of post-poll mayhem’, Reuters, 28 May 2008.

particular and the voters in general – had to be ‘disciplined’ for their ‘delinquent’ conduct on 29 March 2008.

But why target ZANU(PF)’s own support base and strongholds? For ZANU(PF), it was more hurtful to lose a single seat in its traditional strongholds than to lose all seats in the ‘enemy’s’. So, while it was understandable for the party to lose all seats, as it did, in Bulawayo, it was unforgivable to lose two out of eighteen seats in Mashonaland Central, or four of the 23 seats in Mashonaland East. This partly (if not largely) explains why the epicentre of the strategy of ‘electoral cleansing’⁴⁰ was in the Mashonaland provinces, and within them in those constituencies where it lost or won marginally. Even in constituencies where it won, the brutal campaign visited those areas whose polling stations had recorded a loss for the party or where a large opposition vote had been recorded.⁴¹ ZANU(PF) treated those who voted for the opposition in its traditional backyard as stray voters, who, like stray animals, had to be brought back into the kraal, but after some whipping. They had to be taught not to go astray next time. A party politburo member provides evidence of this line of thinking when, quoted anonymously, he warned the ‘stray voters’: ‘We’re giving the people of Zimbabwe another opportunity to mend their ways, to vote properly ... this is their last chance.’⁴²

This line of argument was earlier articulated by Bratton and Masunungure:

The objective was to kill MDC officials and polling agents, displace qualified electoral officials such as teachers, and punish known MDC supporters. The targets of intimidation were not so much the solid MDC strongholds in the cities and the southwest, but politically contested areas in the country’s middle belt and northeast where, in the first round of the election, voters had swung away from ZANU(PF) and toward the MDC.⁴³

Bratton and Masunungure contend that the object of electoral cleansing was to create ‘no-go zones’ ‘where the ZANU(PF) monopoly could be enforced at the local level through the direct and demonstration effects of violence’.⁴⁴ To reinforce this, the regime banned the operations of virtually

40 The term is used by Bratton and Masunungure, 2008, p. 51.

41 As discussed elsewhere, an innovation of the March harmonized elections was the publication and posting of results at the polling station. It greatly enhanced transparency of the results but had the unintended effect of exposing MDC strongholds. On this, Human Rights Watch observed that ‘ZANU(PF) supporters and their allies have not found it necessary to prove that a person voted for the MDC before meting out ‘punishment.’ Instead they have examined results posted outside polling stations to identify areas where people voted for MDC in large numbers, even if the MDC lost to ZANU(PF) in those areas.

42 Bratton and Masunungure, ‘Zimbabwe’s Long Agony’, p. 44.

43 Ibid. p. 51.

44 Ibid. pp. 51-2. The potency of the demonstration effect is best captured by Sun Tsu’s often quoted saying ‘Kill one, frighten a thousand’ (cited in Stiff, Peter, *Cry Zimbabwe*. Alberton, Galago Publishing, 2000, p. 22.)

all NGOs operating in rural areas, especially those delivering humanitarian relief. The consequent human suffering was comprehensive and unprecedented; it was a scorched-earth policy which was comparable in its ferocity and objectives to the Gukurahundi campaign of the early 1980s. It was as if the regime was guided by Emperor Caligula's philosophy: 'Let them hate as long as they fear.' The fear was guaranteed to deliver victory for Mugabe, and the party was emphatic about this. For instance, one senior ZANU(PF) leader told Robyn Dixon of *The Los Angeles Times*: 'There is no way we are to lose the runoff. We are going to make sure of that. If we lose the runoff, then the army will take over. Never be fooled that Tsvangirai will rule this country. Never.'⁴⁵

Associated with the above reasons is a deeply rooted sense of ZANU(PF) entitlement to rule, and to do so for eternity. The top ZANU(PF) political generation and its allies in the military/security establishment have an 'end of history' perspective to the liberation struggle and the achievement of independence in 1980. The attainment of Uhuru through a protracted liberation struggle against settler colonialism marked the end of all struggles, and the triumph of ZANU(PF) was the last triumph. 1980 marked the victory of light over darkness, and in this line of thinking any other struggle in Zimbabwe would be tantamount to an attempt to bring back darkness. This thinking leads ZANU(PF) to brag that it delivered democracy and therefore there cannot be any other democratic struggle. In short, retaining power in ZANU(PF) is a historical imperative. In effect then, by posing a real challenge to take power from the anointed ruling party, the MDC was not only trying to 'reverse the gains of the revolution,' but was also challenging history by so doing. This is the context in which threats to 'go back to the bush' should be understood. For instance, two weeks before the run-off, Mugabe told youth members of his ZANU(PF) party that the war veterans from Zimbabwe's 1970s war of independence had told him they would launch a new bush war if the election was won by the opposition leader Tsvangirai.

They came to my office after the [first round of] elections and asked me: 'Can we take up arms? They said this country was won by the barrel of the gun and should we let it go at the stroke of a pen? Should one just write an X and then the country goes just like that?'⁴⁶

The old guard in ZANU(PF) and the military/security sector is locked into this 'end of history' paradigm and cannot accept let alone appreciate anything that is not explicable within the parameters of this paradigm. This is one of the tragedies of electoral democracy in Zimbabwe.

However one explains the motives behind the architects of Operation Makavhotera Papi, the bottom line is that they wanted to raise the cost of

⁴⁵ 'Zimbabwe is on a political precipice,' the *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 2008.

⁴⁶ BBC, 'Africa pressure grows on Mugabe', <http://www.newsvote.bbc.co.uk> (accessed 16/6/08).

participating in opposition politics and supporting the opposition MDC candidate in the run-off election. The organizers and implementers of the Operation constricted the space so much and lowered the bar so low that it became practically impossible for opposition politics to function. The strategy succeeded and the cost of opposition politics became so high that even the candidate himself was forced not only to withdraw from the race but to immediately seek refuge in the Dutch Embassy in fear for his life.

Tsvangirai's withdrawal and the one-candidate election

On 22 June, just five days before the run-off, the MDC-T candidate Morgan Tsvangirai held a press conference at which he announced his withdrawal from the run-off, citing eight reasons for pulling out; central to these was the intense and widespread violence and intimidation. 'We in the MDC cannot ask [voters] to cast their vote on the 27th when that vote would cost them their lives,' Tsvangirai said, and urged the United Nations and African Union to intervene to prevent 'genocide'.⁴⁷ He gave statistics of the victims of the violence as of that day: 86 deaths, 10,000 homes destroyed, 200,000 displaced, and 10,000 injured. He noted that:

The victims have been MDC supporters. The violence has been clearly state-sponsored and carried out in most cases by members of the Zimbabwe National Army and ZANU(PF) militia. It is true that in some instances our supporters have fought back, in most cases in self-defence. Because of our inability to access the rural areas, the above statistics may be understated.⁴⁸

Soon after the press conference, Tsvangirai sought refuge in the Dutch Embassy but the government and ZANU(PF) derided Tsvangirai's pull-out and his safety fears as groundless and a ploy to seek international attention and sympathy. The electoral body also refused to accept Tsvangirai's withdrawal and kept his name on the ballot paper. The ZEC chairman actually boasted that he was ready looking forward 'to a credible election'.⁴⁹ He also rejected other accusations levelled against ZEC:

- that the armed forces had been forced to vote for a particular candidate – he dismissed this as 'general allegations' and that he had been assured by the commanding officers that 'nothing of the sort had happened';
- that observers had been barred from witnessing the postal ballot process – Chiweshe said the law did not provide for the presence of observers but only a competent witness;
- that there had been a dramatic increase in the number of postal ballots (which allegedly increased from 8,000 to 64,000 postal applications) – the ZEC said this was because members of the army had also submitted returns unlike in

⁴⁷ The *Zimbabwe Independent*, 27 June 2008.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ 'The MDC still to write pullout letter, says ZEC', *The Herald*, 24 June 2008.

March when only police officers applied for this facility; and

- that the public media was biased against the MDC – the ZEC said it had not received any formal complaint from MDC-T about equal access to public media coverage.

Oblivious of Tsvangirai's withdrawal and the inauspicious electoral environment, the ZEC went ahead with the run-off election with Robert Mugabe as the remaining candidate. There were 1,958 ward collation centres and 210 constituency collation centres and a national command centre was established in Harare.

The administrative and logistical arrangements for the election were adjudged by observers to have been satisfactory but there were many irregularities that compounded an already anomalous situation of having a one-race contest in an environment drenched in blood. These included demands by ZANU(PF) local leaders and activists that voters record the serial numbers on their ballots and hand this information over to ZANU(PF) 'wardens' together with their personal details. This was supposedly to enable the 'wardens' to check on who the voters had voted for. Another irregularity was forcing voters to first assemble at the headman's homestead where they would be given numbers after which they would proceed to the polling station led by their kraal heads. Yet another irregularity was that voters suspected of being opposition members or sympathisers were required by local ZANU(PF) leaders to feign illiteracy – no matter how well educated – so that they would be 'assisted' to vote. They would then proclaim their preference to vote 'paMasvingo' (the ZANU(PF) logo) meaning a preference for Robert Mugabe.

The strategic aim of the aggressive ZANU(PF) campaign was to ensure its candidate's victory. But an equally important aim was for Mugabe to win 'resoundingly' so as to shame the party's detractors, and to ensure high voter turn-out another 'operation' was mounted just before polling and this was dubbed 'Operation Red Finger': to avoid voting twice, each voter was required to dip a finger in red ink that is visible but indelible and the message spread by ZANU(PF) was that anyone who would not have voted (and therefore without a red finger) was going to be classified as an MDC person and subjected to the same 'disciplinary' action as meted out under Operation Makavhotera Papi. As a result, many people in the rural areas – but also in some urban areas – were compelled to go and vote just in order to secure the much valued red finger. This is how ZESN described voting day:

The Polling Day was characterized by poor voter turnout in urban areas, an extraordinarily high number of spoilt ballots [39,975 in the March Election against 131,481 in the June Election] with a significant number reportedly carrying insulting messages, an unusually high number of assisted voters, and recording of serial numbers – incidents that point to a banal breach of voter rights and secrecy.

In most rural constituencies, voters were reportedly herded to polling stations by traditional leaders and allegedly instructed to vote for the ruling party candidate. They were also ordered to record their ballot papers' serial numbers and would after polling give them to the local leaders. Soldiers and police presence was reportedly heavy, in some cases their presence overshadowing that of voters.⁵⁰

Table 1 shows the results of the 27 June run-off election and Table 2 compares the results of the March presidential election to those of the run-off election. It is clear from the results that Mugabe had won in the manner he and his party had intended, i.e. with a landslide. Compared to the March election, he had increased his votes by more than one million and spectacularly recovered from winning 43.2 per cent of the votes in March to 85.5 per cent, thus doubling his share. As already noted, Tsvangirai formally withdrew from the presidential race but ZEC decided to go ahead nonetheless. The results showed that Tsvangirai received nearly a quarter of a million votes and in some cases, notably in Bulawayo, he won more votes than Mugabe. Voter turnout in the run-off was almost exactly the same as that for March harmonized elections (42.37 per cent to 42.7 per cent).

Another visible feature of the run-off election was the unusually high number of spoilt ballots, more than treble those of the harmonized elections. There were even the bizarre cases – especially in Bulawayo – of the number of spoilt ballots at a polling station being higher than those of the winning candidate. It was also noteworthy that unlike in the March elections, when it took the electoral body over four weeks to announce the results, for the 27 June run-off ZEC only took two days to announce the final results, and within a few hours the winning candidate had been crowned the President of Zimbabwe.

How did observers assess the run-off election? There was near-unanimity that the elections were far from free and fair. Below is a sample of opinions expressed by the observers from the SADC, Pan-African Parliament and the African Union.

The pre-election phase was characterised by politically motivated violence, intimidation, and displacements.

The process leading up to the presidential run-off elections held on 27 June 2008 did not conform to SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. However, the Election Day was peaceful.

Based on the above mentioned observations, the Mission is of the view that the prevailing environment impinged on the credibility of the electoral process. *The elections did not represent the will of the people of Zimbabwe.*⁵¹ (my emphasis)

⁵⁰ ZESN 2008, p. 67.

⁵¹ SADC Election Observer Mission, Preliminary Statement presented by the Hon. Jose Marcos Barrica, Minister of Youth & Sports of the Republic of Angola and Head of the SOEM, on the Presidential Run-off and House of Assembly By-elections, Harare.

⁵² PAP Interim Statement, 29 June 2008.

Table 1: Run-off Presidential results by province

Province	Robert Mugabe	Morgan Tsvangirai	Rejected/spoilt votes	Total votes
Bulawayo	21,127	13,291	9,166	43,584
Mash. West	25,699	18,459	10,821	285,979
Masvingo	321,404	12,804	7,940	343,948
Mat. North	84,185	40,099	9,907	134,191
Mat. South	92,654	21,687	7,353	121,694
Midlands	302,407	33,555	19,438	355,400
Manicaland	323,284	29,561	17,525	370,370
Harare	156,478	48,307	36,547	241,232
Mash. Central	276,912	4,066	3,409	284,337
Mash. East	315,119	11,171	7,675	333,965
TOTAL	2,150,269	233,000	129,781	2,514,750

Table 2: Results of Presidential Elections – March and June 2008

First Round	Robert Mugabe	Morgan Tsvangirai	Simba Makoni	Langton Towungana	Total valid
Popular vote	1,079,730	1,195,562	207,470	43,584	2,497,265
Percentage	43.2	47.9	8.3	0.6	100
Spoilt					39,975
Second Round					
Popular vote	2,150,269	233,000			2,383,269
Percentage	85.5	9.3			100
Spoilt					131,481

The prevailing political environment throughout the country was tense, hostile and volatile as it was characterised by an electoral campaign marred by high levels of intimidation, violence, displacement of people, abductions, and loss of life.

In view of the above *the Mission concludes that the current atmosphere prevailing in the country did not give rise to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections.*⁵² (my emphasis)

The poll was peaceful and held in accordance with the electoral laws of Zimbabwe;

There was violence in the run down to the elections;

The fear of violence deterred popular participation in the electoral process;

There was no equitable access to the Public Media.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing factors, in the context of the AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, *it is the considered view of the African Union Observer Mission that the Election process fell short of accepted AU standards.*⁵³ (my emphasis)

From whatever angle one looks at the 27 June presidential election, one thing reverberates: they were heavily militarized and the resultant ballot was more a barometer of people's fears than of people's choices. It was, in every sense, a choice-less election that failed to settle the question of who should legitimately lead the people of Zimbabwe. Rather than resolving the legitimacy question, the run-off election deepened it. This set the stage for the search for a non-electoral solution to the Zimbabwean crisis.

Conclusion

Elections to choose who will govern us are supposed to be political processes whose result is often indeterminate. This was the case with the 29 March harmonized elections in which politicians campaigned *politically* for the free expression of the people's choice. This element of free choice is precisely what the architects of Operation Makavhotera Papi wanted to eliminate and replace with a predetermined outcome. To this extent, the political process was overthrown and in its place came a militarized process in which the military elite came to the aid of their political counterparts in a toxic combination of ZANU(PF) and the military/security complex. In this political-military alliance, the military was the dominant player and this robbed the electoral process of its political character. In the process, the winds of democratic change were defied; a peaceful, election-centred process of transition away from authoritarianism and towards democracy was interrupted. Our conclusion is that the 27 June 2008 presidential run-off election was a militarized election without a choice.

⁵³ AU Preliminary Statement of the African Union Observer Mission, 29 June 2008.