

The Role of the Military in the 2023 Zimbabwe Elections: A Nested Game Analysis of Civil-Military Relations

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Abstract: *The elections that took place in Zimbabwe on the 23rd and 24th of August 2023 were disputed and was condemned by the SADC, the AU and the EU among other Election Observer Missions. In southern Africa, Zimbabwe is unique in that the ZANU-PF civilian-military elite symbiotic relationship has always been very visible when ever there is an election. However, President Mnangagwa allegedly tried to skirt military elite influence in the August harmonized election. This paper examines the influence of the military on the 2023 Zimbabwean elections and the extent to which the civilian leadership has ‘succeeded’ in minimizing military interference. Employing the nested game approach and rational choice theory, this qualitative study utilizes desktop research and interviews to argue that while President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa attempted to diminish the military’s role, the military elites remain influential kingmakers in Zimbabwean politics. The paper concludes that despite seeming silencing of the guns, the military’s deeprooted command and control persist, impacting the future political landscape of Zimbabwe.*

Keywords: Harmonised election, Zimbabwe, FAZ, Heritage, ZANU-PF, Citizens Coalition for Change, Operation “Sasatisamarina”

1. Introduction

Elections have always been an important cog in measuring a country transition and growth of democracy. It is an opportunity when the citizens have power to elect into office leaders whom they think will work to improve their welfare with regard to eradicating poverty, sound political stability and economic growth that improves the ordinary people’s livelihoods. However this democratic space is being throttled as the electorate “vote without choosing,”(Nyiayaana, 2019). This explains why scholars like Breytenbach, Diamond and others contend that though elections continue to be important they are not sufficient bring the desired majoritarian change of authoritarian governments and improve the lives of the ordinary people. Africans in different African countries had very high expectations when their countries became independent. They hoped that they would be beneficiaries of post-colonial eco-political gains that the colonial system had denied them. However, in some, if not most African countries, these hopes were soon dampened by a distortion of political governance processes embedded in power contestations that impacted detrimentally on economic governance and vice versa (Adisa 2002, Okumu et al. 2020, Khadiagala 2015).

The capture and retention of power is a driving factor in political competition including the whole electoral process from campaigning to voting (Prempel 2007; Kollner and Basedau, 2005; Kiel 2018). After the August 2021 elections in Zambia resulted in the removal of Edgar Lungu’s Patriotic Front party from power, Zimbabwe buzzed with excitement as some Zimbabweans also looked forward to dislodging ZANU-PF from power in the 2023 elections. The Emmerson Mnangagwa ZANU-PF led government has been a disappointment to many. Since the 2018 elections Zimbabwe has witnessed an accelerated economic deterioration, intense authoritarianism, kleptocracy and kakistocracy that has been evident through the much touted and publicised Aljazeera 2023 “Gold Mafia” documentary. Arguably, as of August

2023 the Zimbabwean political environment remained militarized as has been the case whenever an election is looming.

Contestations on sound political governance in sub-Saharan Africa are on the rise. Research carried out by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), connotes that there has been an increase in conflicts and ‘electoral’ violence on the African continent since 2013 and have significantly increased between 2017 and 2018 (Nyirongo 2020). It is widely accepted that development cannot thrive in an environment with political contestations that are increasingly becoming violent, poverty stricken and unparalleled economic inequalities. The African Union (AU), in its 2016 “Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020” noted that:

Most crises and violent conflicts in Africa are driven by poverty, economic hardships, violation or manipulation of constitutions, violation of human rights, exclusion, inequalities, marginalization and mismanagement of Africa’s rich ethnic diversity, as well as relapses into the cycle of violence in some post-conflict settings and external interference in African affairs. (Lusaka Master Roadmap, 2016).

What is disturbing is that the August 23-4 harmonised elections were fraudulent and fell short of fulfilling the minimum Southern African Development Community (SADC) election standards on Principles and Guidelines for Democratic elections. The pen once again did not usher in the much anticipated change of government and has been unable to ‘silence the guns?’ Mnangagwa seemingly trying to wean himself from the grip of the military elites explaining why he minimised the leading role that the military-chiefs used to play in previous elections. Questions arise whether the military elites have been silenced and have gone back to their barracks? Why have they remained quiet when everything

seems to be going wrong under the watch of the second republic that they foisted into power?

The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing desktop research and semi structured interviews with key informants. The nested game approach and rational choice theory are applied to analyze the interactions between civilian and military elites within the context of Zimbabwe's fragile state index.

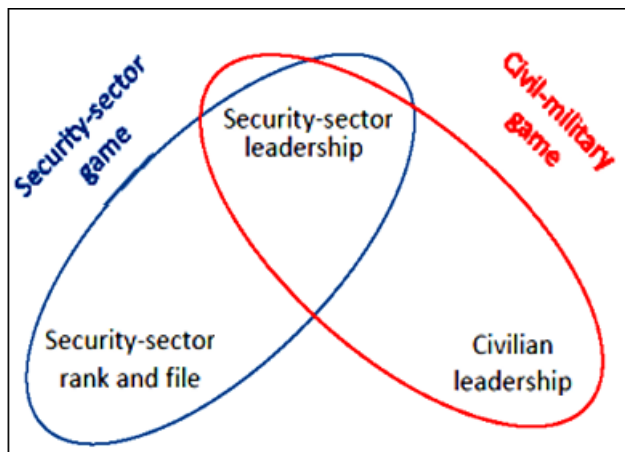


Figure 1: The 'Nested Game' Framework

Figure 1 above shows the interactions between three main (sets of) actors in Zimbabwe: (1) civilian political leadership; (2) security-sector leadership; and (3) security-sector rank and file. The civil and military elites are caught up in a web of interactions that I term “nested games.” (Mahuku, 2017) On one hand is the “security-sector” game which involves the military leaders (MLs) and the military rank and file soldiers (MR&F) and on the other the “civil-military game” that links the MLs and the civilian political leadership. The two sets of actors are self-interested and consider the fact that outcomes of their interactions are based on interests, civil-military elite class-based interests. If the civilian elites are under genuine threats of being dislodged from power, they ‘cut’ deals with the military elite who in 2002 said the “office of the president is a straight jacket to be worn only by those with liberation war credentials.” The military elites also use the MR&F disgruntlement to negotiate better deals and to promise the MR&F some kickbacks that come as occasional salary increments so that they remain loyal to the establishment.

The Fragile States Index (FSI) was produced by The Fund for Peace (FFP). It is a critical tool in highlighting not only the normal pressures that all states experience, but also in identifying when those pressures are outweighing a states' capacity to manage those pressures. By highlighting pertinent vulnerabilities which contribute to the risk of state fragility, the Index — and the social science framework and the data analysis tools upon which it is built — makes political risk assessment and early warning of conflict accessible to policymakers and the public at large. The FSI is therefore very important to show the degree of fragility in Zimbabwe that explains why Zimbabweans want change of government at all costs. These approaches are complemented with the rational choice theory (RCT) According to the RCT, when voters go to the election the bedrock of their actions is embedded in a cost-benefit determination (Downs, 1957, Saxena, 2017). It is evident that the August 23-24 harmonised

elections were a stolen election, it was not free, credible and fair explaining why it was condemned by observer missions.

Elections in Africa: a summary

Elections have been fiercely contested in many African countries. Khadiagala (2015), Okumu et al. (2020) concur that despite political pluralism exhibited by most African leaders, conflicts are triggered by various factors that range from “lack of development, poor governance, high level corruption, historical injustices and mismanagement of electoral processes.” Despite the violence and contestations involved elections remain very important though with different outcomes for political parties and their supporters be they losers or winners. Goldsmith (2001) submits that losing an election sometimes carry considerable risks ranging from assassination, exile or arrest. The Archigos dataset (Goemans et al., 2009) gave a record of 285 leaders who lost power from immediate post-independence period in Africa through to 2015. 93 of deposed leaders fled into exile or were imprisoned while 27 were executed. Notably some leaders who lost elections have been tormented by the new incumbents, and have been in and out of jail several times. It is in this context that many presidential elections not only in Africa have been a dog eat dog scenario. This was the case with the disputed Kenyan election in 2007 that was won by Uhuru Kenyatta, and again in the August 2022 election in which William Ruto was pronounced winner against Raila Odinga; in Angola President Joao Lourenco was also pronounced winner against Adalberto Costa Junior in August 2022; in February 2023, Bola Tinubu also won against Peter Obi in a disputed election; whilst in June 2023 President Julius Bio also won against opposition leader Dr. Samura Kamra in a controversial election just to mention a few cases.

It is a fact that unpopular autocratic leaders are preoccupied with the task of keeping themselves and their regimes in power and in Zimbabwe, Mnangagwa and his close political associates are not any different. They also want to weather the political storm in “a political world of great uncertainty and turbulence,” (Jackson and Roseberg, 1984). It cannot be disputed that patronage is the glue that binds elites within government to the regime or leader or some party rank and file to the leader (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Arriola, 2009). Electoral mismanagement and fraud, corruption among other reasons have increased prospects of armed conflicts, widespread mass uprisings and unprecedented violence and even military coups as has been the case in Mali, May and August 2021, September 2021 in Guinea, Chad in April 2021 leading to the ascendancy of general Mahamat Idriss Deby to power; and an unsuccessful coup in March 2021 in Niger. It cannot be disputed that “most parts of Africa remain saddled by violent conflicts and instabilities” (Khadiagala 2015). Harkness (2016) noted that according to Freedom House rating as of 2016; only 12 per cent of Africa can be regarded as “free.”

Whilst elections are fiercely contested, Amozuafor (2017), notes that the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which came into force in 2012, considers unconstitutional change of government “a serious threat to stability, peace, security and development.” The AU and regional blocs do not support unconstitutional changes of government. This would entail that the wishes of the

electorate must be respected and yet the militaries in many African countries continue to intervene in politics wanting to determine electoral and political outcomes. The duty of the military is to protect citizens from external aggression and maintain the territorial integrity of its country. Below the study traces and makes an overview of elections in Zimbabwe chronicling military involvement in politics and why?

Zimbabwean elections 1980-2018: an overview

Zimbabwe became independent amidst a lot of fun-fare. Noteworthy the struggle and consolidation of power was fixated in Mugabe's mind when he won the 1980 elections. Mugabe and his inner circle politicians were concerned with the calculus of power, being in power and maintaining power. As was the trajectory of many African states after the attainment of independence, the struggle for power, its consolidation manifested in one-partyism became the order of the day whilst other things like economic equity became secondary (Ake: 1996). It was clear from the campaigning and voting period that political competition in Zimbabwe assumed a character of warfare as it became difficult for the United African National Council (UANC) and Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU) to campaign in Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) areas of influence just as it was difficult for Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) to penetrate Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) areas of influence. The militaries of these liberation movements systematically used to determine how the citizenry would vote in the election. Norma Kriger (2005) noted that two main strategies have been employed in every election, that is: one, organised violence and intimidation and secondly, the powerful articulation of the liberation discourse that demonised other political parties. Since 1980 the political polarity and violence that grips Zimbabwe during elections depicts "a country at war with itself," Jenkins (2020 p. 6). This view was complemented by Raftopoulos (2013) who contends that ZANU-PF 'victories' are a "harvest of fear." The British Observer Group noted that the ZANU-PF leadership instructed most of its guerrillas not to go into assembly points. They were the ones who intimidated and coercively influenced the masses to vote for ZANU-PF. Tactics used ranged from threats of resumption of war if ZANU-PF lost the election, beating of suspected supporters of other political parties, name-taking and falsely asserting that there were machines inside polling stations that would reveal how people voted (Kriger 2005, 4). Night vigils continued where opposition parties and their leaders were denigrated and labelled reactionaries and puppets of the west. Kriger further notes that "analysts of general elections have ignored or downplayed the ruling party's use of violence and intimidation and the liberation discourse." She goes further to argue that such scholars have missed "an historical pattern misleading characterizations of, and prognoses for, the political system. (Emphasis added). Muzorewa won 3 parliamentary seats while Nkomo won 20 seats and Mugabe got 57 seats.

The 1985 elections were held amidst Gukurahundi disturbances in which about 20 000 civilians were killed in Midlands and Matabeleland provinces for allegedly supporting dissidents. Such gruesome cold-blooded murders were undertaken by Mugabe's North Korean trained 5th

Brigade army (Kriger 2005, Meredith, 2002, Banana 1989, CCJP, 1997) Earlier on, Joshua Nkomo had fled into exile on the 7th of March 1983 as he was verbally attacked and threatened by the ZANU-PF politicians, Enos Nkala, Edgar Tekere, Herbert Ushewokunze, Maurice Nyagumbo and the Prime Minister Robert Mugabe. Upon his return to participate in the 1985 elections he was denied the chance to campaign freely or to hold rallies. Intimidation, violence and murders were once again employed. Some PF-ZAPU political elites, ZIPRA ex-combatants and some civilians were abducted in broad daylight while some were beaten to death and their homes burnt. Despite a decline in voter turn-out the number of seats that ZANU-PF increased to 64, PF-ZAPU lost 5 seats and continued to hold 15 seats in Matabeleland. The White supremacist Rhodesian Front won 15 of the 20 seats, the Independent Zimbabwe Group a break-away group from the RF won 4 seats and an independent got the remaining seat (Kriger, 2005). Mugabe was upset by what he saw as white supremacist intransigence and categorically stated that: ZANU-PF "would conduct a clean-up operation, so that we remain only with the whites who want to work with the government...but the rest will have to find a new home." After having assessed the political situation and being pragmatic, Joshua Nkomo and some of his top party-political lieutenants signed an agreement with ZANU-PF in a Unity Accord of December 1987 heralding the end of violence against PF-ZAPU. In both the 1980 and 1985 elections the military were used to punish those who did not support the ZANU-PF party especially PF-ZAPU supporters.

As already noted above the 1990 elections took place after the Unity Accord of 1987. Political parties that participated in the elections were Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), ZANU-PF, ZANU-Ndonga, UANC, and National Democratic Union. Edgar Tekere formed ZUM after he had been expelled from the party for criticising ZANU-PF leadership for not adhering to its leadership code and corruption. ZANU-PF won 116 seats, ZUM, 2 seats and ZANU-Ndonga 1 seat. ZUM was attacked and criticised for being inclusive especially being aligned with a remnant of Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front, the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe. Edison Zvobgo averred that the Rhodesian Front was still in existence, still pushing the agenda of the 'Rhodies'. In his bid to make sure that Tekere would not get support from the electorate President Robert Mugabe spewed populist divisive propaganda insulated in anti-imperialist rhetoric and maintained that:

...the forces of reaction, racism, division and retrogression which were soundly defeated retreated into the background, but they continue to regroup with new tactics, and new faces. They seize on disgruntled elements of the ruling party who have lost positions in which they totally failed to perform, or unemployed youths, or diehard racists, and try to recover lost ground. These reactionary and inimical forces keep changing tactics but never the objectives of oppressing, exploiting and dominating our people (Kriger 2005, 15).

ZUM was labelled a party of mercenaries, drunkards and lunatics (Kriger 2005, 15). Tekere was accused of trying to assassinate the ZANU-PF top leadership. At one of his rallies Mugabe forewarned Tekere, "...you are playing with fire my dear boy." Tekere survived a planned car accident

assassination with an army truck that killed William Ndongana after a tip-off (Bungu, 2009) ZANU-PF continued to use its strategies of intimidation and violence. One ZANU-PF campaign advert on television warned that there were different ways to die, one was to vote ZUM and the other was HIV-AIDS (Ibid, 16). One of Vice-president Simon Muzenda's bodyguards shot and seriously injured Patrick Kombayi. Some of these perpetrators of violence were not arrested while some who were arrested were pardoned by the president and released.

The 1995 elections were held on the 8th and 9th of April. ZANU-PF continued its tirade against all other parties that participated in the election except itself. The United Party (UP) led by Muzorewa, Tekere's ZUM and the Democratic Party (DP) led by Emmanuel Magoche refused to participate in the election citing intimidation, threats, and violence being dispensed by the CIO and ZANU-PF youths (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, 8). Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole's ZANU-Ndonga and Enock Dumbutshena's FORUM party and ZANU-PF contested the election. Dumbutshena and Sithole were defamed cowards and sell-outs who betrayed the liberation struggle and would never be permitted to rule Zimbabwe. Mugabe urged the youths to defend the party and revolution. Mugabe likened ZANU-PF to an elephant and the opposition to puppies that could only bark and not scare the elephant. As if these insults were not enough the FORUM party was labelled a puppet party. Ndabaningi Sithole was arraigned before the courts being accused of trying to assassinate President Robert Mugabe. ZANU-PF continued to manipulate the electoral process even though it was campaigning against political lightweights. Apart from intimidation and threats of violence food was used as a political weapon; opposition supporters would not be given grain hand-outs by the government. ZANU-PF won the election despite the negative effects of the economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAP).

The ZANU-PF political dominance enjoyed since 1980 was seriously challenged in 2000. Disgruntled by the economic deterioration and suffering induced by the economic structural adjustment programme and exacerbated by the payment of unbudgeted war veterans' gratuities and Zimbabwe's intervention in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Movement for Democratic Change came into existence. The MDC was an umbrella of civic organisations (Kriger 2005; Meredith 2002). The ZANU-PF party's political superiority was dented in the February 2000 referendum that was rejected by Zimbabwean citizens. The rejection of the ZANU-PF proposed constitution was credited to the spirited "NO" by the MDC. It generated a lot of excitement especially that a parliamentary election was looming. Though Mugabe conceded ZANU-PF loss in the referendum, they made land a central issue of their election campaign. The MDC campaign was anchored on pointing out ZANU-PF's economic mismanagement, corruption, cronyism and the executive sanctioning of intervention in the war in the DRC. The ZANU-PF leadership openly encouraged the use of violence on all those who did not tow the ZANU-PF political line. The ZANU-PF crude political tactics reared their ugly head again as had been the case in the 1980 and 1985 elections: the military and the war veterans came in to serve the party-state.

The footprints of the ZANU-PF strategies to win the election were glaring; threats, violence, abductions and murders were perpetrated and unleashed by 'Zanuists' and state security organisations. In a bid to resurrect the Chimurenga discourse ZANU-PF political leaders supported farm invasions that had been started by Chief Svosve and some war veterans and supported by security sector elites. Between February and June 2000 about 1500 farms owned by whites were invaded. Violence was dispensed on farm workers, whites and supporters of the MDC. The MDC party was admonished a party representing white interests and Morgan Tsvangirai a puppet of the British and Americans. President Mugabe warned that "those who try to cause disunity among our people must watch out because death will befall them." Such modus operandi was also expressed by the then Minister of Defence Moven Mahachi who threatened members of his constituency in Makoni west that ZANU-PF would not hesitate to kill supporters of the opposition. Some war veterans also threatened that if the MDC won the election, then the military would intervene and form a government. Border Gezi the ZANU-PF candidate for Bindura also reminded opposition parties that ZANU-PF is well known for spilling blood (Kriger 2005, 26-28), this was in sync with President Robert Mugabe's "ZANU-PF has degrees in violence" outburst, (Moorcraft, 2012). ZANU-PF won 62 of the 120 seats, MDC won 57 and ZANU-Ndonga returned its seat. Threats of violence, violence, and farm invasions continued as Morgan Tsvangirai and Mugabe campaigned for the 2002 presidential election. The security sector elites declared that they would not support anyone without war credentials. The securocrats elites had effectively drawn the line in the sand, they would not acquiesce to a Morgan Tsvangirai victory (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011). Mugabe won the 2002 presidential election getting 56 percent of the vote largely because of the use of violence, intimidation, use of propaganda and enticing the security sector to support him among other strategies. Before the parliamentary and senatorial elections in 2004, President Mugabe as always instructed the youth to ensure a ZANU-PF victory. Kriger has correctly interpreted this as an endorsement of the use of violence ahead of the 2005 elections (Kriger 2005, 31).

The 2005 and the March 2008 elections took place in a more politically subdued environment. Two very oppressive legislations were in use, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). These legislations were an assault on freedom of association prohibiting gatherings and freedom of expression and therefore contrary to the SADC principles and guidelines regarding holding democratic elections. Kagwanja (2005) notes that according to the SADC guidelines, citizens must participate freely in the political process, citizens must be allowed to associate with whoever they want to associate with, every political actor and party must have unlimited access to media coverage and the institution responsible for running elections must be impartial and educate the citizens on elections. Though there was a decline in violence that was dispensed during the 2005 elections, ZANU-PF manipulated the process. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011) avers that the voter's role was in shambles easily perpetuating rigging. The demarcations of constituencies were gerrymandered making sure that more constituencies would be in rural areas where

ZANU-PF 'had' support. In tandem with this is that there were more polling stations in rural areas as opposed to urban areas where the opposition has support.

The 2008 elections were the first harmonised elections in which parliamentary, senatorial and presidential elections were held at the same time in March and a rerun of the presidential election on the 27th of June. In the parliamentary elections the opposition parties MDC-M and MDC-T outperformed ZANU-PF winning a political majority in parliament. The three presidential candidates were President Robert Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai and Simba Makoni who was leader of a new political party Mavambo/ Dawn. The then invited leader of the Welshman Ncube-MDC faction led by Arthur Mutambara did not field a presidential candidate and instead supported Simba Makoni. No presidential candidate was able to get the 51+ vote to avoid a re-run. Interestingly, Masunungure noted that the 2008 harmonised elections were regarded as free and fair, and the outcome was seen as a true reflection of the will of the people. What was vital about the March 2008 election was that though Morgan Tsvangirai did not reach the 51+ vote, he had more numbers in comparison to Mugabe. The electorate voted for Tsvangirai and some for Makoni because of ZANU-PF's political and economic misgovernance. Zimbabwe was experiencing a hyperinflation that sunk workers and the general populace into misery. Shops and supermarkets were empty and basic foodstuffs were not affordable. According to Masunungure cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012, 11):

It can thus be fairly asserted that the 29 March election 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, the campaign afterwards was a visibly militarized one. The security forces, rather the ruling party, were on the forefront, spearheading the march to the 27 June run-off.

When the campaign for the presidential run-off commenced, all hell broke loose. 'Operation Sasatisamarina' was rolled into place. This was a military operation led by Douglas Nyikayaramba. Soldiers were deployed in rural and urban areas to 're-orientate citizens to be politically correct and vote for the ZANU-PF party. In an interview with the author Major Mhepo (not his real name) said that months before an election takes place, soldiers in civilian clothes are deployed in districts to assess the behaviour of citizens, political party affiliation and pass on the information to their superiors. They are also mandated to intimidate and sanction beating and disappearances of those considered being notorious opposition ringleaders in particular constituencies. They provide the names though at times they are not involved in the actual abductions (March 2023, Harare). It must be noted that not all the rural dwellers are supporters of the opposition. Some support ZANU-PF because their views resonate with those of the ZANU-PF politicians and party. These are the ones who provide information and are 'ZANU-PF foot-soldiers' who give information to operating military personnel who will have been deployed to various rural districts and wards, working with some war veterans and some war collaborators who still support the system. This

connotes a massive violation of some of the electorate's right to choose a leader of their choice as what happened in the 2008 June rerun. There was a lot of violence prior to the election run-off. Supporters of the opposition were brutalised, beaten, others abducted whilst others were forced to abandon their homesteads to ensure that they were safe from being persecuted by the military, the youth Border Gezi quasi-militia and the CIO. The Joint Operation Command (JOC), the war veterans, and Mugabe declared the rerun a war. Mugabe said "... we are not going to give up our country, because of a mere X. How can a ballpoint fight the gun?" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Rupiya 2015). By dictating that whatever happens and that an election outcome would not determine who would occupy the highest political office in the land, the military had staged a 'coup.' After an analysis of the March-June 2008 events Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2010), concluded that "elections in Zimbabwe are 'derided, mocked and reduced to a useless exercise to putting a mere X on paper.'" Mugabe categorically stated that "you can vote for them (MDC), but that would be a wasted vote...you will be cheating yourselves. There is no way we can allow them to rule this country. Never ever," (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012, 12-13). Upon realising the brutality being meted on the electorate for supporting the MDC-T, Tsvangirai chickened out and refused to participate in the rerun. Mugabe 'won' the election and was inaugurated. The political and economic environment in Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate and worsen exhibiting attributes of a fragile state that the AU asked the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to intervene. This later led to the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU). Notably, the military were out of their barracks to which they have not returned.

According to Raftopoulos (2013) the 2013 election ushered in a new era of political domination by ZANU-PF that also came to be engulfed by intense factionalism within the party culminating in the 'coup' that removed Mugabe from power. The harmonised election was held on the 31st of July 2013. The SADC tried to dissuade the MDC-T and the MDC-M now led by Welshman Ncube from participating in the harmonised elections since all the reforms agreed to in the Global Political Agreement (GPA) had not been implemented. Buoyed by the large numbers at his closing Harare election rally in which Harare was 'painted Red' Tsvangirai and his supporters were convinced that he was going to rout his nemesis Robert Mugabe all systems out. To Tsvangirai and his supporters' surprise, Mugabe got 61 per cent of the vote and Tsvangirai a mere 33.9 per cent. ZANU-PF won 160 parliamentary seats and combined with those reserved for women in accordance with the 2013 constitution, ZANU-PF had a total of 197 seats. MDC-T won 49 seats and together with 21 for women a total of 70 seats, and 2 for MDC-M and one independent. The two MDC formations later complained that the elections had been rigged and ZANU-PF had manipulated the voters' roll. Southal and Slabbert (2013, 139) contends that "what happened during the 2013 election was nothing new. Rather it was a more vigorous and systematic implementation of all the numerous dubious measures which had been devised to skew the voter before." The ZANU-PF political elites and party has never moved away from the use of intimidation and violence as a strategy for winning an election and this was also the case of the 2013 election that was embedded in subtle intimidation politics.

Notably, it was a movement away from the stark 2008 military overt use of violence though architects of “Operation Sasatisamarina” were operational. ZANU-PF made sure that the electoral playing field was not level, and the electoral process was in its favour.

Besides use of violence, ZANU-PF is alleged to have manipulated the voters roll, it only availed the voters’ role two days before the election (ZESN). The voter registration process was arduous in the urban areas while extensive in the rural areas where most of the ZANU-PF supporters live. According to the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) 99 per cent of eligible voters in the rural areas were registered whilst 68 per cent were registered in the urban areas. Many voters were turned away in urban areas for being at the wrong polling station. ZANU-PF thus also won the 2013 harmonised election because of a harvest of fear or the fear factor. People were categorically coerced from not daring adopt the “bhora musango”/ electoral sabotage and adopt “bhora muggedhi / score the ball” and ensure a ZANU-PF victory. Southall and Slabbert connote that ZANU-PF “masterly transformed the 2008 disaster into triumph through a truly Orwellian interpretation of history and a Manichean interpretation of the present. Raftopoulos also observed that though the 2013 was a peaceful election in comparison to what happened in 2008,” selective coercion, intimidation and the memory of the 2008 events were not absent in this round,” (2013, 983). Apart from this the election board the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) is run by retired military personnel and the Election Command Centres were administered by ‘ex-soldiers’ like Major Douglas Nyikayaramba who was said to have retired but went back to head his battalion after the election.

The July 2018 elections took place on the backdrop of a coup that had taken place in November 2017. As opposed to the electoral defeat by the MDC-T in 2008 inducing overt military invasion of the political space, factional conflicts in ZANU-PF catalysed the military into action resulting in what some scholars have labelled a ‘military led transition’ that was essentially a coup. Mnangagwa instituted some electoral reforms and signed into law the Electoral Act Amendment of 28 May 2018. The ZEC adopted a biometric voters’ roll (BVR). Though there were many presidential candidates, the two main contenders were Emmerson Mnangagwa for ZANU-PF and Nelson Chamisa the Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-A). ZANU-PF won 145 seats of the 210 parliamentary seats, the MDC-A won 60 seats and one seat was won by Temba Mliswa an independent, and another single seat by Masango Matambanadzo of the National Patriotic Front. ZANU-PF returned a two-thirds majority in parliament. The use of threats and intimidation by ZANU-PF politicians and the military cannot be ruled out. The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute in a report also noted that some military personnel had already been deployed prior to the holding of the 2018 election-‘notable continuation of Operation Sasatisamarina’(ZDI,2018). However though the election observer missions like SADC, the EU and others declared that the 30 July 2018 election were peaceful, and held in a more conducive political environment which allowed the electorate to exercise their rights to choose legislators and a president of their choice, opposition supporters did not trust ZEC’s delay in announcing the

presidential results. The released election results showed that ZANU-PF had a majority of the parliamentary seats. On 1 August 2018, a day after the elections the military were unleashed on the Zimbabwean streets to stop MDC-A supporters who were protesting against what they felt as delay in the release of presidential elections. With the military in the streets six civilians were killed whilst others were injured. In some high density suburbs in Harare civilians were harassed and assaulted (Rusinga, 2021; Moyo, 2019). Mnangagwa won the 2018 presidential vote with 50.8 per cent while Chamisa had 44.3 per cent (Africanews). What worried many Zimbabweans was that such outright military brutality with regards to an outcome of an election had never taken place in Zimbabwe during the Mugabe era. Many begun to wonder what picture the cold-blooded shooting of demonstrators portray about the security sector, the political elite, the civilians and the future of elections in Zimbabwe?

Zimbabwean Citizens and the 2023 Election

As has already been noted in the foregoing, the Zimbabwean electorate has been a captured electorate since 1980. This was because when the ZANU-PF party came to power via a manipulated election, “it quickly penetrated the state and nation, making sure that the party was indistinguishable from the state and nation (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2011); what Mandaza refers to as the conflation of the party-state, (Mandaza, 2014). The problem of such a development is that it entrenched the politicization and militarisation of the state and in the process wittingly sanctioned the use of violence during elections. The August 23-24, 2023 harmonised elections was supposed to be a critical election; a watershed election. According to V.O. Key Jr., (1955, 4) critical elections “suggests an election in which from an impressionistic evidence, voters are deeply concerned, and the involvement of the electorate is relatively quite high.” The election was supposed to be a watershed and crucial election in that most Zimbabweans have borne the brunt of ZANU-PF economic mismanagement and authoritarianism since the days of Robert Mugabe through to Emmerson Mnangagwa. As such it was hoped that 2023 is the opportune moment for ZANU-PF to be constitutionally dislodged from power given that some in within ZANU-PF still consider Mnangagwa as unelectable.

Additionally the election took place on the heels of a disputed 2018 election, and ‘a civil-military or military civilian government’ that has accelerated a formidable political and economic crises. The majority of the voters, if they had committed themselves were those between the ages of 18 and 45 years, many of whom have never been gainfully employed and would desire to have a change in their way of living and are mainly supporters of Nelson Chamisa and the CCC party. Since the beginning of the 21st century Zimbabweans have found themselves between a political rock and an economic hard place. As such Zimbabwe was ranked the fourth unhappiest country in the world in the world unhappiest report on the 20th of March 2023. Zimbabwe was also amongst the top countries enduring hardships and misery in Professor Hanke’s annual misery index (HAMI). This thus made the Zimbabwe August 2023 election an interesting critical election. This harmonised election would thus determine whether the path that Zimbabweans as a people take may be a ruinous path or a path that resurrects Zimbabwean citizens from the doldrums of poverty. Voting

for Mnangagwa and the ZANU-PF party is considered by many as ruinous whilst voting for Chamisa and CCC is considered progressive by others. Many of the civil servants, some war veterans, workers in urban areas and the peasants in rural areas attest to the fact that the economic situation is very bad and maintain that the Mnangagwa government is incapable of solving the economic problems being experienced. Those in the opposition contend that Mnangagwa and his cohorts involving the junta are part of the problem and cannot solve the problems that they have created because they are a kleptocracy.

The future of Zimbabwe therefore hinges on whether the electorate exercise its vote freely in an environment that enables them to make rational choices. It is a fact that the right to vote is a well-endowed lynchpin and lifeblood for any democratic State and as such elections must be free, fair and credible meeting local, regional and international standards (Abuya, 2010). Arguably this does not happen in a state exhibiting state fragility. As already noted the social, economic and political situation continued to be unbearable and if election and voting process was to be free and fair ZANU-PF would not win the elections.

As already noted some citizens support ZANU-PF whilst others support the opposition CCC party. These citizens buy from the same shops, supermarkets and are experiencing the same electricity loadshedding and blackouts. What differs is how the rank and file of both parties benefit from patronage networks. The economic situation had already deteriorated that in June 2022, Nelson Chamisa the leader of the CCC party claimed that Zimbabwean citizens including the army were fed up with President Mnangagwa and his government and were just waiting for the 2023 election. Addressing a rally in Kwekwe Chamisa said:

Mnangagwa's days at State House are numbered...everywhere we are going in the country, people are speaking about change. Change is on the horizon and the country is ready for change. Civil servants are saying I must take the reins of power. The students, ordinary citizens, and the army are saying the same. This time around no poll is going to be rigged. We are currently working on reforms and we are going to force reforms on ZANU-PF (Bulawayo24, 2022).

It is a paradox that the CCC 'party/movement' did not have structures, did not have a constitution, offices and everything revolved around a single individual "Chamisa chete chete" meaning 'only Chamisa,' hence Zanuists has labelled it directionless. Nelson Chamisa and a few acolytes Fadzayi Mahere and Ostalos Siziba were the ones running the party though everything arguably revolved around Chamisa in what he referred to as "strategic ambiguity," a strategy meant to confuse the enemy by 'saying what they do not mean, and to mean what they do not say' (Moyo, 2023). Moyo opines that CCC was a sea of confusion. Some citizens maintain that Chamisa's traits and way of conducting politics are not of a democrat but a dictator. One would not help wondering why a lawyer would lead a party that does not have structures and a constitution. Jonathan Moyo (2023) maintains that praxis politics connotes that:

You cannot do without structures...in politics leadership is about managing conflicts and differences to bring a cross section of people from a diversified political base to work together for a common purpose

Moyo's hard-hitting opinion piece maintains that for Chamisa to think that he would dislodge ZANU-PF in the 2023 election was just "tomfoolery." Chamisa thrives on people's disillusionment with the ZANU-PF government and thus wishes the economic hardships being experienced continue to worsen so that he benefits from a 'harvest of disillusionment' as people want change for the sake of change. Both ZANU and CCC started campaigning for the 2023 elections without manifestos. Zimbabwean citizens seemed more confused than ever and were embedded in intense contradictions but do citizens not know what they want? This cannot be true with regards to most Zimbabweans, they know what they want.

Most of the people interviewed by the author clearly stated that Zimbabwe was more than ripe for a change of government. Zimbabwe since independence has had only two political leaders from the same party, ZANU-PF. All those interviewed agreed that the political, social and economic situation in Zimbabwe is bad and will continue to be bad since ZANU-PF politicians and the party-state is not accountable to the electorate and use violence to enforce their will on citizens. The majority of Zimbabwean citizens are frustrated, angry and all intimated that they have had enough. They blamed the Mnangagwa government for economic mismanagement, endemic corruption, patronage and failure to commiserate with the suffering of civil servants and the general populace. It is alleged that even most of the armed robberies are now being carried out by retired and serving members of the security sector.

This is the unhealthy environment under which the 2023 elections were held. A majority of those interviewed said that they were going to make sure that they vote ZANU-PF out of power and defend their vote as if oblivious to what happened in 2008 as already noted in the foregoing. If the youths and their disgruntled parents voted for change and defended their vote it entails that the citizens had become monsters that the ZANU-PF system created. To borrow from Vladimir Putin, "if you compress the spring all the way to its limits, it will snap back hard" (Bok et al., 2015, 6). Zimbabwean masses are fed up of politically self styled leaders who impose themselves on the people assuming a self-arrogated right to leadership by virtue of having participated in the liberation war against the Smith government. Notably there are some Zimbabwean masses who support the ZANU-PF party. Its not that they are unaware of the shambolick state Zimbabwe is in but they are beneficiaries of the system: involved in what Chabal and Daloz call "corruption of survival," (1999, 98). In Zimbabwe corruption has thus become part of the social fabric of life. It has become habitual for lowly remunerated Zimbabwean public servants and the political elites and their connections who see this as an avenue for self enrichment. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011, 3) contends that "ZANU-PF has become nothing but an elite project of wealth accumulation and it has completely lost interest in the emancipatory agenda..." This explains the rampant looting, political and economic dislocation that resulted in Mugabe's auster and has continued

unabated under Mnangagwa and Chiwenga's watch. Jonathan Moyo (2023) submits that:

When the state of the economy screeches and becomes unresponsive to any policy stimuli, with prices and exchange rates continuing to uncontrollably spike precipitously; screaming and defying even the market laws of supply and demand; and when this threatens everyone, particularly the lives and livelihoods of the masses, the peasants and the vendors; then... you have an existential threat whose control is now beyond fiscal and monetary authorities; a threat which specifically endangers the survival of the Republic itself. In the circumstances, the urgent need for a commensurate national security response cannot be over emphasised. The existential threat is not business as usual, and it is no cause for celebration by any right thinking Zimbabwean.

It is a fact that the performance of the Zimbabwean economy is militating against government aspirations of remaining the governing party. Zimbabwe has become a failed state. Arguably, given ZANU-PF's political *modus operandi* and the system's authoritarian violence embedded DNA, "the prospects of either the MDC or CCC party coming to power through an election or of civil society pressurizing ZANU to reform itself seem remote", (Kriger 2005, emphasis added). This was also corroborated by former ZANU-PF politicians, Central Committee and Politburo members, Dr Simba Makoni, Dr Sikhosana Moyo and Professor Jonathan Moyo that ZANU-PF would not reform itself out of power. Jonathan Moyo (2017) contends that to think that Mnangagwa is different from Mugabe "... will be greatest treachery ever witnessed..."

According to Jonathan Moyo, Mnangagwa "is a lot of things, some of which are unspeakably ugly, but one thing that everyone can now see beyond any doubt is that he is not presidential material, he is far from it, such that every day that goes by with him in that office is unrecoverable loss to Zimbabwe's recovery." The Mnangagwa led government have superintended the governance rot that has taken place from the time they came to power. This has resulted in many Zimbabweans ironically regarding them as the actual "criminals" that had surrounded Robert Gabriel Mugabe. No notable political elite has been jailed with the exception of a few who were arrested and released in what has been coined the "catch and release" strategy, Ignatius Chombo, Prisca Mpfumira, Obadiah Moyo, Justice Mayor Wadyajena never spent a day behind bars, Undenge who was sentenced 2 years, Wicknell Chivhayo who has been involved in a lot of scandals and Henrietta Rushwaya who was arrested at the Gabriel Mugabe international airport for possessing 6 kg of gold in her handbag were acquitted, Diamonds, platinum and other minerals are being smuggled out of the country with the police and immigration officers being asked to look the other way. The rich are continuing to enrich themselves with the poor becoming poorer.

The irony of it all is that the military elite have remained silent. Neither has the Mnangagwa government served the people nor has it fulfilled its pre-2018 elections. Videos of top government officials, their cohorts or families splashing their

ill gotten wealth are awash on social media. The Mnangagwa government has preyed on the national purse and yet has failed to move Zimbabwe out of the the political, economic and social mess that has ravaged Zimbabweans with the exception of the political and military elites, and the so-called 'economic entrepreneurs who are benefitting from the disorder obtaining in Zimbabwe. Tendai Biti has occasionally submitted that the Mnangagwa government is a dictatorship that is economically clueless. The CCC political leaders see themselves as a viable opposition that must replace ZANU-PF; ZANU-PF accuses the opposition leaders for supporting the continued imposition and maintenance of sanctions that have been detrimental for Zimbabwe's development and has had negative effects on the general populace. The CCC leadership lacks political gravitas and has not shown the much needed combative political leadership when required. They have not openly sided with the civil servants as salaries have become worthless. Both ZANU-PF and CCC MPs seem more interested in their welfare. They remained mum to the 'loans' (those given in the past have never been repaid) dolled out to the executive, US\$500 000 to Cabinet ministers, US\$350 000 to deputy ministers, US\$ 40 000 to parliamentarians and US\$ 400 000 chief justices and CIO directors US\$ 350 000 (Zimlive), at a time when other civil servants are being paid a pittance. This explains why Simba Makoni said there is no notable difference between ruling party and opposition politicians. Arguably for the government to approve the so called "loans" at a time the economy is not performing well and the same government is blaming sanctions as the cause of the misery that teachers, nurses, rank and file security sector are experiencing boggles the mind.

Former deputy prime Minister Arthur Mutambara (2023) labelled the Mnangagwa government as "incompetent, corrupt, authoritarian and directionless." ZANU-PF has no alternative maverick leader since the demise of Robert Mugabe. Both Mnangagwa and Chiwenga are uninspiring and seem to have simply been pushed forward to be 'leaders' of the ZANU-PF by a coterie of beneficiaries 'behind the throne.' It is a fact that factionalism has continued to rear its ugly head in ZANU-PF. What is surprising is that despite massive corruption in the Gold Mafia exposee, Zimbabwean citizens have not gone into the streets to voice their indignation. Other citizens have continued to support ZANU-PF with some actually equating ZANU-PF and E.D. Mnangagwa to "honey." Some citizens titter between being captured by the ZANU-PF ideology that is anti-neocolonialism and the human rights and democracy discourse espoused by the CCC that is vehemently critical of ZANU-PF authoritarianism, patronage politics and gross economic mismanagement. However, Amanda Hammer and Raftopoulos cited by Gatsheni Ndlovu (2011, 12) contend that the Chimurenga ideology is now exhausted and is now devoid of its emancipatory aspect. Threats of physical harm and violence have therefore been used as vehicles to maintain ZANU-PF rule.

In a dictatorship, citizens become languid. Makoni (2020) observed that in Zimbabwe, "*fear has become the dominant force in the citizens' lives; fear of breaking the law, fear of the punitive measures which might result from an unsuccessful attempt to be free...Fear of violence that the power of ZANU-PF is anchored on, fear of physical harm,*

being murdered in cold-blood, colliding with an army truck or 'losing control of a vehicle having come across a black dog, a black cat, culminating in dying on the spot.' CCC accuses ZANU-PF of busing supporters or forcing citizens to attend their rallies, which is true. Makoni (ibid) argues that ZANU-PF seized to exist among the people a long time ago, and the demise of the party has been with us for a long time. Ideally, both ZANU-PF and CCC political parties may be misled by the number of people who attend their rallies, forced or not; and have failed to analyse past experiences. At times the number of attendees at rallies does not transform to those who vote on the election day because of electoral volatility and voter apathy. Citizens therefore vote not because the law permits them to vote but because they want to advance their interests. According to Bratton and Bhoojedhur (2019) the political commitment of the ordinary men and women in the streets to endure long queues to exercise their right to vote, it depicts an attempt to make their voices heard; the same with voter apathy, a signal that people may have lost faith in the electoral processes. Though some scholars (Boone and Kriger 2016; Magure 2014; Raftopoulos 2013) contend that rural voters are victims of politicians during elections, it can also be argued that some of the rural folks are willing accomplices and participants in campaigning for their parties, even dispensing violence and intimidation in their localities.

Raftopoulos (2013) argues that the ZANU-PF party is popular in rural areas because its populist ideologies resonate with the ordinary peasants in the rural areas. Arguably, Makoni's argument that the ZANU-PF party seized to exist among the ordinary people is correct. If not for the military elites and some war veterans ZANU-PF would have gone the way of United National Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia and Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania. Zimbabwe is a broken society (Ncube 2020), with some benefiting from thievery and laughing at those suffering. The situation is further compounded by "political barbarians at the gate" from both the ruling party and the opposition CCC. They are all clueless and heartless and care less for the people they are supposed to serve. According to Mutambara (2023), central to Zimbabwe's national tragedy "is a government whose primary raison d'être is the feudal pursuit of the insatiable financial interests of Mnangagwa's family and clan members; at the expense of national aspirations. The Zimbabwean general populace are damned if Chamisa does not get into power, and are damned if Mnangagwa gets into power." The contradictions have been worsened by the two main political contenders and their cohorts, the political barbarians at the political gate. For Mnangagwa his preoccupation is none other than keeping himself in power at all costs even through violence and cold blooded murder. For Chamisa all he is interested in is getting into power, the effects of the sanctions on the general populace do not matter, let the economy scream, the people must suffer so that as a 'political saviour and political messiah' he will have power thrust upon him. In his own words he will sabotage anything that may improve the lives of the ordinary people as long as he is not in power 'Kudira jecha musadza'; sprinkling sand in a prepared dish so that it cannot be eaten. For the political parties, morality is not an issue. As the Shakesperian Cassius to Brutus in Julius Caesar, "ambition is made of sterner stuff"; for Mnangagwa and Chamisa power supplants any conscience. It would have

been 'a political miracle' for the outcome of the election not to be controversial and violent.

Given the risk of losing power, political survival at whatever cost is now the central concern and guide to all actions and decisions made by Mnangagwa and his cohorts. This explains why he is now said to be sidelining the military in his bid to retain power in the August 2023 harmonised election (NewsHawk July 2023) and yet it cannot be disputed that it is the military elite who have kept ZANU-PF in power since 2000. It is alleged that Mnangagwa is fed up with the military elite's "we put you there blackmail" and therefore want to systematically disentangle himself from their tentacles and push them back to their barracks. Will the military elites be an easy push-over? Is it now not a case of the tail now wagging the dog? Arguably, the 2023 election was a controversial election that was not free, fair and credible as was articulated in the various Election Observer Missions.

The Zimbabwean Military

As the norm in democratic countries and as expected in professional civil-military relations, the military and other organs of security of the nation-state must be apolitical. They must be non-partisan in the execution of their duties and not be beholden to any political party or individual. (Huntington 1957; Luckham 1993) Khisa and Day (2022, 20-21) submit that central to the civil-military problematique is the dual role that the military finds itself engulfed in. The duty of the military is to protect the country from invasions, the citizens and the government of the day. Notwithstanding, during colonial and postcolonial rule in Africa, the military has been accused of playing a predatory role on the citizens and notoriously defending the status quo. Feaver cited by Khisa and Day connotes that "because we fear others, we create an institution of violence to protect us, but we fear the very institution we created for protection." Refusal by political elite to relinquish power. In a study on the behaviour of militaries in Africa, Harkness (2016) observed that where the military supports the politicians, the government has survived, and where the military has refused to support politicians, the governments fell. It is a fact that when a military is politicised and interferes in elections then the wishes of the electorate are affected. Ake (1996, 5) argues that the military did not invite themselves into politics but "the character of politics engendered military rule by degenerating into warfare, inevitably propping the specialists of warfare to the lead role. In Zimbabwe this came to be because support for political parties and elections have always been viewed as a zero-sum game and the role of the military has been that of "gravediggers and not midwives" (Harkness 2022) of growth of democracy in the Zimbabwean political space. By allowing themselves to be politicised and militarising institutions as a way of safeguarding civil-military elite interests they are acquiescing to the entrenchment of authoritarianism that was cemented by the conflation of the party and the state. Laakso (2003) submits that the conflation of the party and state begun in 1987 when Mugabe became president. The party and the state became the same thing as there was no longer a clear-cut distinction.

Is it possible to "silence guns in Zimbabwe? Chabal (1983) and Davidson (1981) contend that since 1980 the military has always influenced political arrangements. Therefore, it is not

surprising that the military in Zimbabwe overtly intervene in electoral politics when Zanu-PF hegemony is under threat. In 2002 the securocrats led by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces commander, General Vitalis Zvinavashe in a televised presentation declared that:

We the (JOC) Joint Operation Command, wish to make it very clear to all Zimbabwean citizens that the security organizations will only stand in support of those political Leaders that will pursue Zimbabwean values, traditions and beliefs for which thousands of lives were lost in the pursuit of Zimbabwe's hard won independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests. To this end, let it be known that the highest office in the land (the presidency) is a straight jacket 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 existence of our sovereignty. (Mahuku, 2017- Press conference, 09/01/2002)

The declaration made by the security sector and now referred by many analysts as the 'Zvinavashe Doctrine' determines the actions of those in power and determine those who get in power. Anyone who goes against this finds himself or herself politically isolated and in political oblivion. The doctrine reigns supreme in Zimbabwe. The soldiers have brutalised civilians and have become an impediment to growth of democracy in the country and this is what happened in 2008 when the JOC and President Robert Mugabe refused to hand over power to Morgan Tsvangirai. President Mugabe with the support of the securocrats maintained that "a pen cannot dislodge the gun." This meant that 'an election would not determine who ascended to the highest political office but the military.' Moorcraft (2012, 157) in his book "Mugabe's war Machine," correctly noted that 'Zimbabwe has never enjoyed the classic Clausewitzian separation of military and state.' Masunungure (2009,2) opines that the ZANU-PF elite civil-military elites subscribe to an "end of history" perspective and that they are the paragon of a liberation party that brought democracy to Zimbabwe. This arguably gives them the erroneous mindset that they are the 'alpha and omega' of Zimbabwean politics. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012, 13) "ZANU-PF leadership considers itself to be so enlightened as to know what is good and bad for the masses without consulting them, as well as to have a mandate to thoroughly discipline the masses if they deviate from the good path and vote against it."

Rusinga (2021) many civil society organisations and some political parties have been pressurizing the government to undertake security sector reforms. The basis of such calls is the preponderant role that the security sector has played and continue to play in electoral politics. Chitiyo and Kibble connote that Zimbabwean politicians have always maintained that they will never acquiesce to such reforms. One senior ZNA interviewed by Chitiyo averred that, "why should we reform...To us security sector means regime change, so that is not going to happen...if the British want to talk to us, then they must forget about this security sector reform." It is simply utopia to think that the Mnangagwa leadership will give-in to such pressures and institute security sector reforms. Masunungure (2009, 84) argues that "in the political world of

ZANU-PF, the ballot is subservient to the bullet which is supreme, arguing that this view is the supreme vitiation of elections as an expression of democratic choice." It is beyond dispute that there is a symbiotic relationship between the civilian political elite and the security sector elite including the security sector rank and file who participated in the 1970s war of independence. Arguably this conforms to Rebecca Schlif's Concordance theory (cited by Mahuku 2017, p.45) that indicate that the military, ruling politicians and some of the ordinary masses rank and file are involved in a cooperative relationship that "may or may not involve separation of political and military institutions, but does not require it" Such interactions are embedded in military-society relations are ingrained in the Zimbabwean society norms. In Zimbabwe the military elite are members of the ZANU-PF party and government. The civil-military elite are therefore in partnership with the military and political party rank and file for the survival of the party-state. It is now beyond any reasonable doubt that the 2017 military coup was serving the interests of one civilian faction, the Lacoste group and the military elites. Makoni (2020) submits that a reading and analysis of the speech made by General Constantine Chiwenga, and the coup spokesperson Major-General S.B.Moyo shows that the coup was a factional fight and had nothing to do with the condition of life of the ordinary citizens. It is therefore not surprising that after the 2018 harmonised election when the MDC-A supporters demonstrated the political and military elite unleashed the police and later on soldiers who did not hesitate to use live ammunition on unarmed civilians. Moyo argues that Mnangagwa and his handlers came to power via the gun hence the military is their bedrock of their survival in politics.

It is evident from the above that the securocratic elites in Zimbabwe are the ones ruling Zimbabwe though under a civilian guise of Mnangagwa, Mohadi, and a retired Chiwenga. Just like strategic political decisions were made by the JOC in the 2008 election rerun and in the November 2017 events; the military are the ones in power. Alexander and Tendi (2018) correctly noted that when the civilian politicians wobbled, the military stepped in to fill the political void and ensure ZANU-PF survival. Commenting on the post-colonial state Ake (1996, 3) claims that "the state remained as it was during colonial era...it continued to be totalistic in scope...and relied for compliance on coercion rather than authority." aptly applied to the Zimbabwean context. The security sector has been the vehicle used to maintain the status quo. Jenkins (2020) asserts that there is a menu of strategies used to manipulate the electorate during elections. As already noted, rewarding supporters by giving them freebies, violence and intimidation are the hallmark of elections that has been held in Zimbabwe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012, 1) concluded that "in Zimbabwe, elections have become little more than empty rituals with the system of electoral democracy being used to mask the nakedness of the one party mentality and authoritarianism of the ZANU-PF led by the late President Robert Mugabe and now Emmerson Mnangagwa." He went further to note that (2012, 7) "elections have never been happy moments in Zimbabwe...election campaigns and post-election politics have gone hand in glove with violence and death." All this has been a result of military intervention in national election processes. In an interview with author, one military elite, a Colonel submitted that the military in

Zimbabwe will always be involved in politics. He went further to argue that the military in Zimbabwe cannot be apolitical as it is a product of the liberation struggle and this explains why they are the custodians and stockholders of Zimbabwe's independence. The JOC is therefore vital in determining together with the executive and other arms of government advising on how security, stability and development can take place. The Zimbabwean security sector has been the vehicle of the party-state authoritarianism and avarice for material things that has led to the entrenchment of kleptocracy that the military elites have not condemned under the current Mnangagwa led regime. Laswell made an ingenious definition of politics, as "who gets what, when and how?" As already noted, the military elite intervention in politics and defence of the status quo is to protect interests of the junta. Arguably the politicisation of the military and the militarisation of politics and government institutions have had an everlasting influence on the military to perceive themselves as guarantors of Zimbabwe's independence yet they are simply protecting their assets evident in the post-"Operation Restore Legacy" hoax that masked the coup. It is now an alleged public secret that factionalism has continued to rear its ugly head post-2017 coup.

According to the *ZimNewsHawk* (05/05/2023) factionalism has been ignited by the growing rift between supporters of President Mnangagwa and Vice-President Constantine Chiwenga, a rift denied by the two leaders. It is alleged that prior to the 2017 coup, Chiwenga and Mnangagwa made a gentleman agreement that Mnangagwa would rule for only one term, a thing that Mnangagwa has reneged on, explaining why he is the 2023 ZANU-PF presidential candidate. Some of those interviewed by one of the authors opine that President Mnangagwa tactically out-manouevred the retired general. It must be pointed out that many of the military elites who 'shoved' Mnangagwa into power have been retired and reappointed either to be Zimbabwean ambassadors in different countries or in government. However some of the military generals were victims of the COVID-19 pandemic which has given Mnangagwa room to consolidate power. Some in the security sector interviewed by the *NewsHawk* (2023) pointed out that Mnangagwa is trying to wean himself from the military who put him into power in 2017 and be his own man explaining why he has retired and reappointed the military generals to other portfolios in government or as ambassadors. Arguably the military remains a serious contender with regard to power politics, in Zimbabwe power revolves around the military as evidenced by the Zvinvashe Doctrine hence we contend that it is still too early to "silence the guns" in 2023 after being 'kingmakers' in 2008, 2013, through operation Sasatisamarina, 2017 through the coup, and in 2018. Whether Mnangagwa will be able to dismount the 'political cannivor' without being devoured would be a political miracle in Zimbabwe.

As already stated in the foregoing, the securocrats chiefs' statement in 2002 show that the military has been part of the civilian ruling matrix 'behind the scenes.' Through the 'Zvinvashe Doctrine' the military openly gave themselves the power to determine who occupies the highest political office. This became apparent in the 2008 Operation "wakavhotera papi?/who did you vote for?" and their stark refusal to accept the outcome of the March 2008 vote.

Military visibility and presence on the Zimbabwean political space culminated in the November 2017 coup that dislodged President Robert Mugabe from power. Notably, given the risk of the Mnangagwa government being dethroned in the 2023 election and the material benefits of office, political survival of the civil-military elites remain a key concern and determines the political decisions made by incumbents in the highest political office. Emmerson Mnangagwa 'stole' the 2023 election given the unpopularity of his government and the unprecedented economic deterioration in Zimbabwe.

ZANU-PF is aware that Zimbabweans are disgruntled hence Mnangagwa used FAZ to carry out "Operation Sasatisamarina" that was always carried out by the military to ensure ZANU-PF wins the 2023 elections. As pointed out above ZANU-PF civilian-military operation "Sasatisamarina" is always operational during elections as it was rolled out by the late Major-general Douglas Nyikayaramba. This operation enabled ZANU-PF to win the 2013, 2018 and the 2023 elections. In 2023 FAZ was used to weaken military elite influence on the ZANU-PF leadership and presidency. Though military elite influence seem to be in decline and peaceful, this is cosmetic. Christine Sylvester (1986) correctly observed and submitted that the name of Zimbabwe's game of politics is "persuasive pretence" at which the political grandmaster prevails (emphasis-mine). Will the regional and international community allow the ZANU-PF civilian-military elite compact or their internal struggles that I term contradictions within contradictions to determine the future Zimbabwean political space and continue holding the majority of the Zimbabwean citizens at ransom? This will indeed be an acid test for SADC and the AU as Zimbabwe may continue to be 'the sickman of Southern Africa.' Though the military elite seem to have been left chasing Mnangagwa's shadow and have been silenced in the Zimbabwe 2023 election, the civil-military fatigue is becoming noticeable.

In conclusion, while President Mnangagwa has made efforts to reduce military influence in the 2023 elections, the military remains a significant force in Zimbabwean politics. The seemingly silencing of the guns is superficial, as the military's command and control tentacles remain entrenched. The future political stability of Zimbabwe will depend on addressing these deeprooted civil-military interactions.

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