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Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa

1975–1976

From the perspective of the British and American diplomats in the region, prospects of a more radical or “extremist” faction taking control of ZANU seemed more realistic after the assassination of Herbert Chitepo on March 18, 1975. Chitepo’s death and the rearrest of ZANU leader Reverend Sithole by the Smith regime in Salisbury on March 4, 1975 offered little hope that the Lusaka agreement would channel the liberation movement under the newly formed African National Council coalition. The British were interested in locating Robert Mugabe. Although Mugabe had been released from detention in 1974, his whereabouts were unknown to the British in April 1975. He had been scheduled to attend an OAU meeting in Dar es Salaam as part of the African National Council group, but Bishop Muzorewa informed the British that Mugabe had not attended and had gone to Mozambique, where he was under house arrest.

The British high commissioner to Zambia, Stephen Miles, suggested that Mugabe would have difficulties if he were sent to Lusaka, because he had accused the Zambian government of involvement in Chitepo’s death. Miles added that “provided he [Mugabe] gave assurance of working within ANC and abandoning ZANU he might be released.”¹ A few days later, Peter Barlow, a leading Rhodesia expert in the FCO, wrote a brief summary on Mugabe at the request of the prime minister’s office. Barlow explained how Mugabe had been the “second in rank” in ZANU but reportedly had taken over from Sithole during their time in detention. Mugabe had gone to the Lusaka talks in November 1974, but the four Presidents “insisted on the reinstatement of Sithole.” Barlow indicated that Sithole had done well in regaining his supporters in Rhodesia, under the African National Council, since that time. Barlow was also under the impression that Mugabe had left Rhodesia

¹ Miles from Lusaka to FCO, “Your Telno 38 to Lourenço Marques: Robert Mugabe,” April 15, 1975, FCO 36/1728, BNA.

on April 4 with Edgar Tekere because of the rearrest of Sithole. Mugabe had apparently told the Amnesty International representative in Salisbury, when they spoke at Sithole's trial, that "they expected more redetentions." Barlow also speculated that the Rhodesian authorities had possibly tipped off Mugabe about his possible redetention, "so that he would remove himself without causing the regime embarrassment of a new martyr."²

Robin Byatt, an important British diplomat in the Rhodesian department in the mid-1970s, who would later become the first British high commissioner to Zimbabwe in 1980, recommended caution over supporting Mugabe in 1975. Byatt warned against reaching assumptions about why Mugabe was arrested by the Mozambicans. "I am not confident that we know the whole story. The convolutions of the feuding which has been going on within the ZANU faction of the ANC are complex and obscure, involving personal, tribal, and some political differences." For the moment, Byatt recommended that "it would be unwise to make any intervention on his behalf vis-à-vis the Zambians or FRELIMO, even though we have some degree of consular responsibility for him as a Rhodesian citizen."³ It would take another three or four months for the British and Americans to sort out what had happened to Mugabe and why he had gone to Mozambique. Before continuing that narrative, it is important to first establish how events in Angola and Mozambique heightened the Cold War elements of the Rhodesian conflict and drew the Americans into a more direct role in the crisis.

Delivering a Unified Liberation Movement for Zimbabwe, 1976

Given the poor record of cooperation both within and between ZANU and ZAPU during the 1970s, it was no small task for Julius Nyerere and the other Frontline State presidents to try to push ZANU and ZAPU into some sort of unified movement. While the "old guard" of ZAPU and ZANU were attempting to reassert their control of the liberation war, a younger generation of military leaders met at the Mgagao ZANLA camp in Tanzania after Chitepo's death. During this crucial meeting in October 1975, they produced one of the key

² R. A. C. Byatt, "Robert Mugabe," April 18, 1975, FCO 36/1776, BNA.

³ *Ibid.*

documents in the Zimbabwean liberation war, the Mpagao Declaration, which included a statement distancing the younger leaders from the old guard leaders (such as Nkomo and Sithole) and claimed it was time for the younger leaders to push forward with a united command of ZANLA and ZIPRA. Wilf Mhanda maintains that it was the Mpagao Declaration that made it possible to form the ZIPA, because it denounced Sithole's role as leader of ZANU and distanced the military leaders from the old guard political leaders.⁴ As mentioned earlier, the Mpagao Declaration did, however, recognize Robert Mugabe as the only political leader who could act as a spokesperson for this new military force.⁵ The new organization, ZIPA, took effective control of the liberation war with the support of Nyerere and Samora Machel. In terms of future diplomacy, it is important to note that Nyerere insisted that ZIPA receive all military assistance through the OAU's Liberation Committee. Agreement was reached a few weeks after the Mpagao declaration with Nyerere to restart OAU's Liberation Committee's military assistance as long as both ZIPRA and ZANLA leaders agreed to work together within ZIPA. As Wilbert Sadomba recalls, this "rapprochement of ZIPRA and ZANLA boosted military aid in the form of supplies from foreign allies, especially to the near-starving, Chinese-backed, ZANLA forces."⁶

Nyerere had insisted on this channeling of military supplies through the OAU's Liberation Committee to force a unity between the two factions. Nyerere explained in an April 1976 meeting with the US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, that this was to avoid another Angola, where a Chinese-supported faction had confronted a Soviet-supported faction. Nyerere claimed that Nkomo had complained about the arrangement, because the Soviets would likely reduce their support for ZIPRA if it had to go through the OAU's Liberation Committee. Nyerere told Kissinger that he had rebutted Nkomo's complaint by saying "We will tell the Russians that if they cannot accept channeling aid through a third organization, then they are only interested in

⁴ Wilfred Mhanda, *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter* (Harare: Weaver, 2011), 90.

⁵ Gerald Mazarire, "ZANU's External Networks 1963–1979: An Appraisal," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017), 96.

⁶ Zvakanyorwa Wilbert Sadomba, *War Veterans in Zimbabwe's Revolution: Challenging Neo-colonialism and Settler and International Capital* (Oxford: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 20; Mhanda, *Dzino*, 91.

creating factions.”⁷ Kissinger replied to Nyerere “We support your policy. It’s a good idea.” He then asked how the aid was apportioned. “We don’t,” Nyerere said. “One army is being built. The freedom fighters have come under a joint leadership.” At this point the new leadership was not identified, but Nyerere added that they refused to work with Muzorewa. Later in the conversation, Nyerere said military aid for FRELIMO had been channeled through Tanzania and the OAU’s Liberation Committee. Kissinger responded, “Even previously we never opposed FRELIMO because it was a unified movement. Its ideologies are not our own, but we deal with it. The question of ideology is not an obstacle for state relations.”⁸

The stage was set, therefore, for a leader of a unified liberation movement to emerge, and Kissinger had given his support to Nyerere, in particular, and all the Frontline State presidents more generally, to produce the new unified leadership. In April, during Kissinger’s first Africa trip, the British and the Zambians were confident that Joshua Nkomo was the right man for the job. It would appear even Nyerere, who would become a strong supporter of Mugabe after Geneva, still believed Nkomo was the frontrunner in March 1976. According to details provided to the British by journalist David Martin, after Martin met with Nyerere in early March 1976, Nyerere was not yet a strong supporter of Mugabe. Martin related Nyerere’s impressions of the Zimbabwean leaders: “Despite his insistence that freedom fighters were now primarily loyal to [the] new military leadership, i.e. ‘Third Force’, Nyerere still backed Nkomo as [the] best of the Zimbabwean political leaders.” Nyerere went further, as he “dismissed Muzorewa, Sithole and Chikerema with one-word epithets: to these [he] now added Mugabe.” According to Martin’s story, Mugabe “apparently has, contrary to Karanga claims, little or no influence among freedom fighters and at most limited access to the camps.”⁹

In late February 1976, after the ZIPA commanders had demonstrated their ability to wage war against the Rhodesians, Nyerere and Machel signaled to the British that their support for the African

⁷ NSC, “Memorandum of Conversation, Nyerere and Kissinger,” Monday April 26, 1976, Dar es Salaam, Document 01933, Digital National Security Archives, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ Miles from Lusaka to FCO, “Rhodesia,” March 8, 1976, item 14, FCO 36/1851, BNA.

National Council group was waning. A British diplomat who met with Nyerere in Dar es Salaam reported that Nyerere now held the view that talks between Smith and the African National Council could “come to nothing” because the factions were “dealing from weakness.” Nyerere reportedly said, “Nkomo won’t fight, the Bishop wants to preach, and Sithole is a write off.” Nyerere had told a visiting Norwegian Labour Party leader that “a new and more dynamic leadership is forming.”¹⁰

In May 1976, Nyerere was even more adamant that time was running out for the African National Council leaders, and for Nkomo. British diplomat and key FCO advisor on Rhodesia, Dennis Grennan, reports of a meeting he had with Nyerere’s confidant, Joan Wicken, in Dar es Salaam on May 10, 1976. Wicken passed a message from Nyerere to then prime minister James Callaghan: “He [Nyerere] felt that that if the ANC political leadership remained split then the events of the next few months would pass them by, and a new leadership would emerge from the ranks of the Third Force.” Wicken said it was an urgent matter, according to Nyerere, “as events in Rhodesia were likely to hot up very quickly and that this really was the last chance for the Nkomo’s and the Muzorewa’s [sic].” Wicken relayed Nyerere’s request to the prime minister that it would be good for Callaghan to “put as much pressure as possible on Nkomo to get him back into a united ANC.”¹¹ Wicken emphasized that the power behind Nyerere’s “last chance” remark was his confidence in the newly realigned “Third Force” under ZIPA. Nyerere “did not think that even the South Africans would get Smith to negotiate” and thought that the Frontline State presidents were convinced they needed to “get the war under way as quickly as possible.” To do this, Wicken described their plan to concentrate the fighting forces in Mozambique “and as far as possible in the same camp.” She added that it was hoped this move “should help to get over tribal divisions and create a sense of unity on the basis of common objectives, training and experience.”¹²

It was into this precarious situation that the Americans suddenly arrived on the scene, prompted by Kissinger’s attempt to score a Cold War diplomatic victory in southern Africa before the end of President

¹⁰ Strong from Dar es Salaam to FCO, “Rhodesia,” February 25, 1976, item 4, FCO 36/1851, BNA.

¹¹ D. J. Grennan, “Notes for the Record, Rhodesia,” May 10, 1976, item 50, FCO 36/1851, BNA.

¹² *Ibid.*

Gerald R. Ford's brief term in office. All of this required the cooperation of the Frontline State presidents to bring a unified Zimbabwean nationalist movement to the negotiating table, along with South Africa's help to bring Smith and his Rhodesian Front to meaningful negotiations. As the next chapter will explore, the resulting Geneva conference in late 1976 brought all the key actors together, but few of them were capable of accepting any meaningful shifts away from their original positions. The Geneva conference is important, however, because it very much assisted Mugabe's claims as the political leader of ZANU and helped him to start on the road toward establishing his alliance with ZANLA leaders as well.

Mugabe's Diplomatic Efforts

As will be argued in the next chapter, Mugabe's ability to present himself at Geneva as the leader most capable of unifying and leading the guerrilla movement based in Tanzania and Mozambique, and to present himself as a moderate to the Americans, was part of a larger effort by him to externalize, or "internationalize," ZANU's nationalism – a lesson he learned in the early 1960s.¹³ Nkomo assumed that he himself was the logical leader of the Zimbabwean liberation movement, based on his longstanding role as the "father" of Zimbabwean nationalism. He was put forward as such by the British and the Zambians, but the Americans were not as willing to accept Nkomo for a number of reasons. Firstly, Nkomo received funds from the Soviets and therefore was perceived externally as more likely to receive aid from the Soviets and Cubans after coming to power. Secondly, even though Nyerere would persuade the Americans in 1976 that the fighting forces would decide (as in FRELIMO's case) their future leaders, none of the old guard leaders, except for Nkomo, were sufficiently in command of the fighting forces to claim sole leadership. Nkomo, however, did not have the advantage of successes on the battlefield as ZIPA was having in 1975–76. Lastly, there was the issue of ethnicity, with Nkomo a Kalanga, but associated with the larger minority SiNdebele speakers, which meant he was a minority leader against the chiShona-speaking population in Zimbabwe. The

¹³ See William C. Reed, "International Politics and National Liberation: ZANU and the Politics of Contested Sovereignty in Zimbabwe," *African Studies Review* 36, no. 2 (September 1993), 31–59.

wildcard in all of this was Mugabe, who had played his cards well by establishing himself in Mozambique.

A key step in Mugabe's rise to the leadership of ZANU and ZIPRA was the Mgagao Declaration, which, after Chitepo's death, recognized Mugabe as the leader of ZANU who the ZANLA/ZIPA forces trusted to negotiate on their behalf. Mugabe might have been put under house arrest in Mozambique by Machel to keep him from interfering with the newly formed "Third Force," ZIPA. Nyerere and Machel were concerned ZIPA would repeat the murderous factionalism experienced in previous attempts at cooperation between ZANLA and ZIPRA. As Zimbabwean historian Wilbert Sadomba argues, this did not stop Mugabe from using the text of the Mgagao Declaration as justification for his leadership role. To Sadomba and others, that was not the document's intention. The ZIPA fighters "expressed sympathy for Robert Mugabe 'for defying the rigours of guerrilla life' and chose him to be their 'middle man' (i.e. power broker)" but this did not mean that they recognized him as their leader.¹⁴ Mugabe would, however, make the most of the opportunities offered by American and international attention in 1976 to better position himself as the key leader in a coalition of liberation forces.

Given his lack of international recognition, Mugabe began a diplomatic campaign to establish his role as both the leader of ZANU and ZIPA by July 1976.¹⁵ He met with British diplomats in Maputo for the first time on July 20, 1976. The account of the meeting characterized Mugabe as a politician wanting to impress upon the

¹⁴ Sadomba, *War Veterans in Zimbabwe's Revolution*, 21. For the struggle between ZIPA leaders and Mugabe, see David Moore, "The ZIPA Moment in Zimbabwean History, 1975–1977: Mugabe's Rise and Democracy's Demise," in Carolyn Basset and Marlea Clarke, eds., *Legacies of Liberation: Post-colonial Struggles for a Democratic Southern Africa* (Toronto and Cape Town: Fernwood and HSRC, 2011), 302–18. For the full text of the Mgagao Declaration, see Appendix C in Mhanda, *Dzino*, 278–83. The key passage reads: "An Executive Member who has been outstanding is Robert Mugabe. He has demonstrated this by defying the rigours of guerrilla life in the jungles of Mozambique. Since we respect him most, in all our dealings with the ANC leadership, he is the only person who can act as a middle man."

¹⁵ Mugabe met with US congressional representative Steven Solarz in July 1976. Mugabe told Solarz that "today the Third Force high command was composed entirely of ZANU military leaders who were loyal to him." Maputo to State, "Solarz: Meeting between Congressman Solarz and ZANU leader Edward [sic] Mugabe," July 9, 1976, 1976MAPUTO00785, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–76, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

British that he was not a radical in the FRELIMO mold. For example, he emphasized his Catholic background, and hence,

on human grounds, if no other, [he] does not wish for a protracted guerilla war. He pointed out that unlike FRELIMO, who have come to politics from guerilla war, he (and the other Zimbabwe leaders) were politicians and have only taken to armed struggle in despair of a political settlement. He does not therefore share the outlook of the FRELIMO leaders.¹⁶

Further in the report, Mugabe indicated that "he gathered that the US and UK wanted to see Nkomo as the leader of the future independent government." Charles de Chassiron, an FCO diplomat stationed in Mozambique at the time, summarized his reply to Mugabe: "I assured him that this was not so. The leader or leaders would be those who gained sufficient support from the people of Zimbabwe to form a government, and we should have to accept them." De Chassiron relayed Mugabe's skepticism of the US role, stating, "Mugabe said that he had been quite willing to talk to U.S. Congressman [Stephen Solarz] who had visited him, but he remained suspicious of American motives as far as Rhodesia was concerned. He had not forgotten that the U.S. cast its first Security Council veto in 1970 over Rhodesian sanctions." De Chassiron concluded, "This was the first time I had met him. I found him quite an impressive and likeable man, but rather mild and modest with nothing of the swagger or the ruthlessness of Machel."¹⁷

At the time of these first encounters with Mugabe by a new generation of British diplomats, the leadership question in ZANU and ZANLA was still unsettled. Wilf Mhanda has argued that he and other ZIPA military commanders were in the process of developing ZIPA into a political organization in its own right after 1975, but Nyerere and Machel were working to unify the existing ZANU and ZAPU leaders with ZIPA to work as a unified force at the Geneva conference. ZIPA's political aspirations and their challenge to Mugabe's and Tongogara's leadership of ZANU and ZANLA were to be brought to an abrupt halt after the Geneva talks.¹⁸

A report sent by the British Head of Chancery in Lusaka, Jeremy Varcoe, in mid-July 1976 indicates how important the approval of the

¹⁶ Charles de Chassiron to Laver, "Rhodesia Department," July 26, 1976, Maputo, pp. 1 and 2, FCO 36/1853, BNA.

¹⁷ Ibid. ¹⁸ See Mhanda, *Dzino*, 135–97.

Frontline State presidents was for the Zimbabwean nationalists. Varcoe described, second-hand, a meeting between a Zambian journalist and Nkomo. The journalist told Varcoe that Nkomo “had been understandably depressed and had conceded that if things went on as they were the man likely to emerge as the first leader of Zimbabwe was Robert Mugabe.” In this situation, just a few months before the forced unity of the Patriotic Front, Nkomo was pessimistic about his chances to emerge on top of the Zimbabwean nationalist leadership struggle. This was a rhetorical style Nkomo was well known for, however. He was willing to express the worst-case scenario to see what options others might recommend. In this case, it would appear his reason for pessimism was the decision by the OAU’s Liberation Committee “to authorize all arms and equipment to be channeled to the freedom fighters through the governments of Mozambique and Tanzania.” Nkomo felt that his ZIPRA troops were being marginalized by this decision, because it helped “the former ZANLA guerrillas” who were seen as “now the sole recipients of outside support.” According to this source, “Nkomo further admitted that Mugabe had a considerable following amongst those in the camps.”¹⁹ Nkomo and his generals would find ways to continue to supply ZIPRA from the Soviets and Eastern bloc allies via Angola, so his pessimism on this point would not be supported as the war intensified.

Varcoe had met with Stephen Solarz, a US congressional representative, on July 11 in Maputo. Solarz had just returned from the port town of Quelimane, Mozambique, where he had met with Mugabe. According to Varcoe, Solarz’s impression confirmed Nkomo’s concern about ZANLA’s position in 1976: “Obviously Mugabe made a big impression on Solarz who shares Nkomo’s view that unless there is some dramatic new development ZANLA will be the force which effectively wrests power from the whites.” Varcoe added, however, that it appeared that “Mugabe is still under FRELIMO control to the extent that he is not allowed free access to the ZANLA camps but he claims (and we have some corroboration for this) that he is in close contract with the freedom fighters.”²⁰ Solarz’s contact with Mugabe had shown that some American politicians were trying to make sense of

¹⁹ J. R. Varcoe to Barlow, “Rhodesia,” July 13, 1976, item 94, FCO 36/1825, BNA.

²⁰ Ibid.



Figure 4 Edward Ndlovu, Joshua Nkomo, Clement Muchachi, and Henry Kissinger. Lusaka, Zambia, April 27, 1976. Courtesy Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

where the leadership would come from should progress be made in the talks. Before the Geneva talks, Mugabe was only just beginning his campaign to prove that he was the right man for the position.

Still, Nkomo had a strong ally in President Kaunda of Zambia. During Kissinger's first Africa trip in April 1976, Kaunda had arranged for Kissinger to meet directly with Nkomo in Lusaka. Nkomo was clearly Kaunda's choice; he reasoned that Nkomo was the most moderate of the leaders, and that if the United States would get behind him, he would quickly drop his ties to the Soviets and the Cubans and guarantee a Zimbabwe favorable to Zambia and the United States.²¹ In July 1976, this plan was apparently acceptable to Kissinger, as he expressed in a breakfast meeting with then CIA director George Bush. Bush summarized Kissinger's prediction of how the Rhodesia plan would progress: "the UK would be out front, the UK would put forward a guarantee

²¹ Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 170.

scheme, some land would be distributed. Smith would turn over the reins of government to Nkomo, the UK would be back in Rhodesia for two years.” Bush concluded, “The British want credit for the plan. The whites would stay. Apparently, Kaunda, Khama, and Nyerere all agree Vorster is on the program. The program must be kept quiet, otherwise if the Soviets find out about it they would try to blow it sky-high.”²²

Kissinger never met directly with Mugabe during his 1976 shuttle diplomacy, something that Mugabe would criticize him for later when discussing the issue with American diplomats. However, other senior level American diplomats met with Mugabe during the Geneva talks. These conversations gave Mugabe an opportunity to introduce himself to a new cadre of American diplomats. As he had done in the early 1960s, he gained influence by presenting himself as willing to work with the United States.²³ By the mid-1970s, there had been little continuity among American diplomatic personnel in Southern Rhodesia. The Americans had closed the Consulate General’s office in Salisbury in 1970 as a response to British demands for diplomatic isolation of Ian Smith’s UDI government.

Indicative of this lack of continuity were the views of Ambassador Edward Mulcahy, who had served as the consulate general in Salisbury from 1959–63. Since then, he had been promoted to new roles in the state department, serving as Kissinger’s deputy assistant secretary of state in 1972, then as US ambassador to Chad, before being appointed ambassador to Tunisia in 1976. In April 1976, Mulcahy was asked to comment on a document circulating in London that suggested he had signed off on the notion of supporting Mugabe “as a compromise leader,” as a better choice over Nkomo and Bishop Muzorewa. The letter had been shown to Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere by journalist David Martin, and therefore came to the attention of the American diplomats in Dar es Salaam. Ambassador Mulcahy vehemently denied any involvement with the document and called it a forgery. He went on to call Mugabe a “has been” with little chance of surfacing as a contender for the leadership role

²² George Bush, “Notes on Breakfast with Secretary Kissinger, 13 July,” July 14, 1976, CIA Electronic Reading Room, FOIA DOC_0000496841.

²³ Mugabe had been particularly close to the American Consul General, Paul Geren, in the early 1960s. When ZANU was forming in Dar es Salaam in August 1963, Geren quickly traveled there from Salisbury to assess what Mugabe and Sithole might need in terms of assistance from the Americans. See Timothy Scarnecchia, *The Urban Roots of Democracy and Political Violence in Zimbabwe: Harare and Highfield, 1940–1964* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 135–36.

among the Zimbabwean nationalists.²⁴ Given the years that had passed since Mulcahy had left Salisbury in 1963, it isn't so surprising then for him to reach this erroneous conclusion about his "old" Zimbabwean contact.

Kissinger and Nyerere Meet in Dar es Salaam, April 1976

Nyerere certainly viewed the trajectory of the Mozambican liberation struggle as a potential template for the Rhodesian struggle. After an hour of private talks on Sunday April 25, Kissinger and Nyerere met with their colleagues and drank a toast at the presidential residence. Kissinger did not take any wine and Nyerere called him a "teetotaler." Nyerere then explained his own attitude toward drinking: "I was a teetotaler. Until the victory in Mozambique. I never dealt with Portugal. I never knew Portuguese wine." Nyerere went on, telling Kissinger:



Figure 5 Henry Kissinger and Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere. Dar es Salaam, April 26, 1976. Courtesy Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

²⁴ "Secret U.S. Policy document on Rhodesia," April 23, 1976, 1976LONDON098848, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–376, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

Then Samora [Machel] discovered stacks and stacks of wine in cellars there. He sent it to me. So they'll serve it to you. [Laughter] Since Samora sent it to me, I call it 'Samora' [Laughter] I always say: 'Bring me Samora.' [Laughter].²⁵

Kissinger followed up this banter by asking Nyerere to tell him about the origins of FRELIMO. Nyerere explained the history of Mozambican resistance, starting from 1962 and Eduardo Mondlane's work at the United Nations, Mondlane's formation of the "front for the liberation of Mozambique," and the fight against the Portuguese, "a year after the formation of the OAU." Kissinger asked about Machel's trajectory to the leadership role, and Nyerere's response serves as a model for what he and others likely wanted to see happen with the Zimbabwean nationalists.

Nyerere said Machel was "one of the freedom fighters" who worked as a hospital assistant before leaving Mozambique and then went to Tanzania where he joined the army. When Mondlane was assassinated in 1969, Machel was selected as leader. Kissinger, in a display of his lack of knowledge about the region, inquired, "Oh, Mondlane was assassinated?" Nyerere's explanation serves as an outline of what he likely envisioned for the new "Third Force," ZIPA, and his hopes for new, unified Zimbabwe liberation forces: "It was planned by the Portuguese, with infiltrators. When he was assassinated, they came together to find a new leader. They were divided, as the politicians now fighting in Rhodesia But at the Congress, the fighters came, so they chose Machel." Kissinger replied that Charles Percy, a US senator, had been impressed with Machel and that the United States was "not interested in pitting one faction against another." He reiterated that when he met with Nkomo in Lusaka, it was "just to show the symbolism of meeting with someone from the Liberation Movement" and that he would be "interested in meeting Sithole as well."²⁶ Kissinger was still, apparently, unaware of Mugabe's campaign to be the main leader of ZANU.

Kissinger and Nyerere met again the next day, Monday April 26, at the Tanzanian State House. Nyerere took the opportunity to criticize

²⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Nyerere and Kissinger, Msasani (The President's Residence), Dar es Salaam, April 25, 1976, Nyerere and Kissinger, Msasani, Document 01932, Digital National Security Archive [DNSA], 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

Bishop Muzorewa for his inability to provide financial assistance to the freedom fighters. Nyerere told Kissinger that the new ZIPA forces “refused to see Muzorewa because they didn’t want to identify with one faction. They are still ready to meet with a united political leadership.” Nyerere went on to criticize Muzorewa for withholding funds he raised from Scandinavian countries: “The Bishop collected one million dollars in Scandinavia, but he hasn’t given any to the freedom fighters!”²⁷

An interesting counter narrative to Nyerere’s criticisms of Muzorewa had come a month earlier, when Muzorewa had sent a long and detailed complaint to Nyerere, written in March of 1976. He accused the OAU’s Liberation Committee and the Mozambican and Tanzanian governments of keeping the African National Council from supplying and training their troops. Muzorewa wrote that both he and Reverend Sithole were kept from meeting with the liberation forces in the camps of Mozambique and Tanzania. A copy of Muzorewa’s complaint, addressed to Nyerere as “Chairman of the O.A.U. sub-committee of four Frontline States,” is in the archives of the former Yugoslavia.²⁸ The accusations are detailed and sharp, describing how different teams of the African National Council leadership had, on multiple occasions, travelled to Tanzania and Mozambique to address the liberation forces, but were kept from doing so by the leader of the OAU’s Liberation Committee, Tanzanian Colonel Hashim Mbita. According to the document, Mbita was in the process of forming ZIPA, the “Third Force” that Nyerere and Machel had wanted to replace the factionalist groups in ZIPRA and ZANLA. The document attempts to refute claims that the leaders of the African National Council had not been willing to travel to Tanzania to meet the fighters in their camps: “The story going around that the leadership has 4 times refused to go to the camps to explain things to the cadres and give them direction and guidance is not true. Rather, the African National Council leadership has been refused access to the camps.”

²⁷ NSC, Memorandum of Conversation, Nyerere and Kissinger, Monday April 26, 1976, Dar es Salaam, Document 01933, DNSA, 6.

²⁸ “Memorandum to the Chairman of the O.A.U. sub-committee of four Frontline States His Excellency President Julius Nyerere, from the African National Council of Zimbabwe (A.N.C-Z),” *Arhiv, Centralnog Komiteta Seveza Komunista Jugoslavije*, A CK SKJ, IX, 140/47, Br. Listova 10, datum 24, IV, 1976. Thanks to Sarah Zabic for sharing this and other Zimbabwean related files with me.

Muzorewa describes how after a Frontline State presidents' summit in Lusaka in September 1975, the African National Council leaders had been "assured by President Machel that we could come to Mozambique and embark on concrete preparations for waging armed struggle." Two members of the African National Council's defense council went to Mozambique to "put forward a program of action." However, they were told that "the time was not yet ripe for the ANC leadership to go into the camps" and they should return to Lusaka. Further attempts to go to Tanzania and Mozambique are detailed, describing how each of these was turned back because "the spirit in the camps is sour," allegedly according to Colonel Mbita whilst he was establishing the "'Third Force' high command with dissident elements." The document goes on to name these dissident elements, and to associate them with Herbert Chitepo's assassination. The "ring-leaders" are described as those who had stood "against unity as constituted on December 7, 1974."²⁹ This was the date when the Lusaka Agreement was signed, which had placed Muzorewa, at least on paper, as the official leader of the merged ZAPU, ZANU, FROLIZI, and the African National Council. Muzorewa would make similar complaints again in 1978, as is discussed further in Chapter 6, but it shows the extent to which Nyerere and Machel, along with the OAU's Liberation Committee under Mbita's command, were heavily involved in shaping the "Third Force" and limiting Muzorewa's and Sithole's contact with the liberation forces. That Nyerere would go on to complain to Kissinger about the ineptitude and lack of interest on the African National Council leaders' part in supporting the war effort raises some interesting questions about how both sides made accusations and counter accusations. It would also show Nyerere's lack of patience with Muzorewa and Sithole.

From the perspective of Kissinger and the South Africans, Nkomo and Muzorewa seemed the most likely candidates to take over the leadership from Smith before the Geneva conference. Meeting with Prime Minister Callaghan at 10 Downing Street on August 5, 1976, Kissinger presented his view of the Zimbabwean leadership. "The black Rhodesian leaders would need to be brought in and this might best be done through an approach to Nkomo: to the extent that he was losing support he would want to grasp at this initiative." Kissinger

²⁹ Ibid.

added that “once it was moving it was thought that Muzorewa would not want to be left behind.” No mention was made of Mugabe at all.³⁰ Kissinger made it clear to the British that the United States planned to “use” Smith to get a settlement. He argued that Smith was necessary for the transition to avoid “confusion” that Machel could exploit. “He [Kissinger] concluded therefore that we should use Smith in this sense and then move brutally against him when it was right to do so.” Callaghan asked Kissinger “what kind of ‘brutal move’ could be made against Smith? Could Vorster in fact deliver on this?” Kissinger replied that “he [Kissinger] had warned Vorster that the U.S. Government would turn against South Africa if he backed down.” Kissinger suggested that his leverage with Vorster would be for the United States “to adopt a policy of resisting commercial investment in South Africa on the grounds of its apartheid policy, and this would certainly be popular domestically in the U.S.” Kissinger, was “convinced that Vorster would come along,” and added his personal view of the South African prime minister: “he was not a maneuverer and he wants a move on the situation.”³¹

Records from the Rhodesians in July 1976 indicated that European allies were also pressuring the South Africans to, in turn, put pressure on the Rhodesians to work out a deal with Nkomo. The Rhodesians discussed the Kissinger initiative with a South African diplomat, a Mr. Short. After telling Short that “it seemed obscene to discuss our proposed fate without our participation,” the Rhodesian diplomat asked Short “If they did not see through Russian/Machel grand design” of communist aggression toward Rhodesia. Short replied that “they did but it made little difference. They claimed that they had learned to live with communism and could outwit it and beat it.” Short explained how German leader Helmut Schmidt had made it clear to the Rhodesians that “Europe would only physically intervene to stop further penetration by Russians and allies in Southern Africa if Kissinger’s initiative got rolling.” Schmidt had warned, however, that if Rhodesian intransigence attracted “external intervention,” there should be no doubt that “neither America nor Europe would come to our side.” Short also warned that France’s President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing was

³⁰ “Meeting with Dr. Kissinger on 5 August 1976 at No. 10 Downing Street,” item 111, FCO36/1829, BNA, 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*

“wobbling badly over the supply of sophisticated arms” to South Africa. After these warnings from Short, the Rhodesian diplomat was told that “Nkomo was still regarded as the man we should talk to. This would be [the] only hope for [a] settlement [of] our own making.” The indication here being that Mugabe and ZANLA were assumed to be too closely allied with Machel and Nyerere. “He [Short] thought Kaunda could still be won if we could come to saleable agreement with Nkomo and non-Marxist groupings.”³²

During a September 11, 1976, meeting between Kissinger and then South African Ambassador to the United States, R. F. “Pik” Botha, Kissinger reassured Botha that he trusted Vorster and not Smith, and that “the reports from Rhodesia are scary. Because they [the Smith regime] look weaker. Our bargaining position will erode.” Botha wanted Kissinger to tell Nyerere that the South Africans had removed “a couple of thousand” South African police from Rhodesia, to show that the South Africans were serious about removing their support for the Smith regime in order to hasten a negotiated settlement. Kissinger then stated, “The big problem now is whether the blacks can organize themselves, to respond to our initiative.” Botha replied, “If they can’t you’ll have Muzorewa and Nkomo. The man who first establishes himself in Salisbury is the man who will rule Rhodesia and be recognized by the OAU, even if he initially isn’t the strongest.” Kissinger agreed, adding “We have information that Nkomo is gaining strength.” Once again, Mugabe was not mentioned in this meeting.³³

Kissinger reassured Botha that the British would not pressure the South Africans. But as Ambassador Botha had told Kissinger earlier in August, there was an urgency for reaching a settlement from South Africa’s point of view. “If Smith starts attacking Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique, we’ll be involved in a maelstrom. This is the first public warning . . . We have to figure out a way to stop it. It’s our security and safety that are at stake here.” Botha added, “We won’t let the British lord it over us while Russian tanks come in. We’ll impose it.”³⁴ Kissinger

³² For Gaylard from ADR, “Discussion with Short,” Pretoria, July 8, 1976, item 288, File: “Detente: Official Communications with South Africa,” vol. 4, Rhodesian Government, Prime Minister Department, 51/39/7, Smith Papers.

³³ Memorandum of Conversation, Henry Kissinger and R. F. Botha, September 11, 1976, Washington, DC, Document 02057, DNSA.

³⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Amb R. F. Botha and Henry Kissinger, August 12, 1976, Secretary’s Office, Department of State, Document 02015, DNSA, 9.

responded, “They won’t. It’ll be settled by the middle of September. . . . Once there is a British plan on the table, we can impose it or you can. But if it’s your plan, the world will howl that it’s you. Callaghan thinks he’s clever saying it’s his plan and our leverage.” Botha replied, “Incredible.” Kissinger continued, “It’s personally infuriating, but it’s useful. I’ve been trying to get someone to step forward. If he’s stupid enough to do it . . . It’s a lot better than if I just thrust myself into it.”³⁵ It is possible to think that Botha’s “incredible” response to Kissinger’s comments had to do with Kissinger’s portrayal of Callaghan’s belief that the British should take the lead, or it could also have been a way of expressing his respect for Kissinger’s backhanded strategy to get Callaghan and Britain committed to taking the leading role.

Meeting with Kissinger and others in London on September 4, 1976, the British foreign secretary, Anthony Crosland, started by presenting an overview of the Frontline State presidents’ position. “They felt passionately that it would be necessary to get Ian Smith out of the picture. They would not accept an interim government dominated by Nkomo; they wanted a government more broadly based.” In addition, Crosland added, “Presidents Nyerere and Machel were strongly opposed to Britain’s assuming a colonial role in Rhodesia.” Crosland then asked Ted Rowlands, the under-secretary of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs, to describe to Kissinger his impressions of Samora Machel’s position on negotiations. Rowlands described how impressed they were with Machel, how they found him “unexpectedly pragmatic and un-ideological.” Rowlands interpreted Machel’s view of negotiations: “He [Machel] thought he would be able to get a Frelimo-style regime installed in Salisbury through negotiation because ‘his men’ would come out on top.” Rowlands also added that Machel “suspected that it was our intention to promote the emergence of a government sympathetic to the West.” To which Kissinger replied, “‘He is right!’”³⁶

This was followed by a discussion of the British position on negotiations. Kissinger asked “whether it would be correct to summarise the British view as being that: (i) Ian Smith would first have to go; (ii) there would be a genuine negotiation between the European caretaker

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Record of a Meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the American Secretary of State, Dr. Kissinger, at FCO Office,” September 4, 1976, item 337, FCO36/1832, BNA.

government and the Rhodesian nationalist team; (iii) the two sides would then agree on composition of a provisional government.” Crosland did not object to this summary, but said he thought the Americans “seemed to be concerned that negotiations between a caretaker government and the ANC would be tantamount to a surrender and hence that they would be giving unconditional support to a black government not dominated by Nkomo.” This is an interesting suggestion that helps substantiate that Nkomo was the first choice of the British and Americans, at least in September 1976. Kissinger replied with his usual doom and gloom scenario: “that the worst case he could envisage was one in which a caretaker government was formed and then invited to surrender: the new African government would then split and there would be a civil war.” This echoed his fear of “another Angola,” but it also foreshadows a constant theme over the next four years: the need to try and avoid a civil war between ZANU and ZAPU, or at least while the Anglo-Americans were involved in the transition to majority rule. As time would show, Kissinger was not too far off with his “worse-case scenario,” but it was still a scenario that he believed was worth the risk to gain a Cold War advantage for the United States.

Kissinger then stated something quite curious: “He felt that American public opinion would prefer to see the whites defeated in battle rather than pressured into surrender.” Crosland didn’t believe this to be a possibility, suggesting that if “the whites were asked to surrender, the Rhodesian armed forces would fight.” Kissinger’s comment about American public opinion came from his own experience after the April Lusaka speech. He was fond of relating how that speech had aroused public disapproval, saying that the speech “had provoked 1,800 letters, of which a mere 23 had been in favour of his policies.” The note taker indicated that at this point, Kissinger described to Crosland the “extent of anti-black feeling in the U.S.,” although there was no further elaboration in the notes. This was likely a reference to the American public preferring a war in which the Rhodesians were defeated on the battleground to a surrender, which had more to do with the way Americans racialized the conflict into their own racial history and identities.³⁷ In Kissinger’s calculation of American domestic

³⁷ For domestic pressures on Kissinger and Ford, see Gerald Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War against Zimbabwe, 1965–1980* (Chapel

opinion, it was the case that white racial solidarity with white Rhodesians meant that it would be best to make sure any settlement did not look like “a surrender” of white settlerism. This notion of not making the Rhodesian whites surrender appears often in Kissinger’s discussions on Rhodesia.

Kissinger must also have been concerned about the implications of the Rhodesian talks on the US presidential elections in November, but he would later play down this concern in a conversation with Crosland almost a month before the election. Kissinger related his interpretation of the Frontline State presidents’ view of his motive vis-à-vis the US presidential elections:

They believed that the U.S. needed their support for electoral reasons. But they were wrong. The blacks in America would always vote democrat; the liberal whites, to whom his plan would appeal, would also vote democrat; those to whom his plan would not appeal were Republicans and they might be encouraged to stay away from the polls. In electoral terms, therefore, his present initiative could be a net liability.³⁸

After Kissinger’s boastful remarks to Ambassador Botha a few weeks earlier, it is interesting to read his discussion with Prime Minister Callaghan on September 24. Given that Kissinger already felt Callaghan had put himself and Britain at the front of the Anglo-American initiative, Kissinger kept pushing Callaghan toward committing to this leading role. Discussing British responsibility for the conference, Kissinger gave reasons why the Americans could not lead it: “First, we have no legal responsibility; second, the constitutional forms in which this is couched are foreign to us. For an American diplomat to be doing it would be strange.” Callaghan replied, “You are doing all right!” to which Kissinger retorted, “Stealing your ideas.” Kissinger’s third point was that a more prominent US role would get them in a “Cold War competition with the Soviet Union.” His final point would be the real stickler for the British in terms of the shape of the Geneva conference and their role in it. Kissinger

Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 149–59. Andrew DeRoche, *Black, White, and Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953–1998* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 211–28; Eddie Michel, *The White House and White Africa: Presidential Policy Toward Rhodesia during the UDI Era, 1965–1979* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 144–46.

³⁸ “Record of a Meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the American Secretary of State, Dr. Kissinger, at FCO Office,” September 4, 1976, item 337, FCO36/1832, BNA.

stated, “You have a legal responsibility to create a framework for an interim government.” This is something the British remained steadfastly opposed to accepting. Later in the meeting, Callaghan encouraged Kissinger to work with Nyerere and Kaunda. Kissinger, however, again pushed Callaghan to take the lead. “But it is a lot easier for them to work with the British, and it avoids problems. Because for us to get actively involved would work against all our theories that superpowers shouldn’t be in Africa. It is not an attempt to evade. As we discussed, the objective should be to create as close to a Kenya situation as possible. You are in the best position to do it.”³⁹ Such exchanges showed Kissinger doing his best to manipulate the British into taking the lead and responsibility for future negotiations, using Kenya’s decolonization process as a model.

A few weeks later, Kissinger further bonded with Zambian president Kaunda over their mutual mistrust of the British for their failure to take responsibility for Rhodesia. When Kissinger met with President Kaunda in Lusaka on September 20, 1976, he reiterated his mistrust of the British by presenting his and the American view as more enlightened from an African nationalist perspective than the British view. Kaunda told Kissinger, “I would generally rather deal with the Labour party in the UK. But over Rhodesia we have differed. They did not do the right thing at the very outset. They should have acted firmly at the outset, and if they had, this thing would not have happened.” Kissinger said, “I am struck in dealing with the UK, that they have a funny image of Africa. I really don’t think they understand.” Kaunda replied, “I always said that the United States should not see Africa through British eyes. Since the end of empire they have been insular.” Kissinger added, “And they are both jealous and bureaucratic, which has been our problem on this negotiation,” to which Kaunda responded, “The loss of empire influenced their thinking.” Kissinger concluded, “And it is a pity, because their top personnel are able, but they are such a petty mentality.”⁴⁰ President Kaunda asked

³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Prime Minister James Callaghan and Henry A. Kissinger Cabinet Room, Number 10 Downing Street London, “Southern Africa,” September 23, 1976, Document 0208, DNSA, 3. See also “Note of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and Dr. Kissinger at 10 Downing Street on Thursday, 23 September 1976,” FCO 36/1835, BNA; and “Note of Meeting between the FCO Secretary and the U.S. Secretary of State, Dr. Kissinger . . . FCO Office,” September 24, 1976, FCO 36/1835, BNA.

⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, President Kaunda, Mr. Nkomo, Mr. Mark Chona, Secretary Kissinger, State House, Lusaka, Zambia, September 20, 1976,

Kissinger for a copy of the “Rhodesia points” that he would give to Vorster and Smith. Kissinger stated, “I will give you a copy of the Rhodesia points, but this is not an official version, it is a series of notes, and I would have to disavow them if they are published.” “I assure you they will not be,” replied Kaunda. Kissinger said, “My giving you these is a mark of my confidence in you. But I cannot give them in Dar. Could you talk with Nyerere about it?” “This is a sensitive issue,” Kaunda replied.⁴¹ As it turned out, Kissinger was involved in some of his trademark subterfuge here, as he would in fact give Smith more bait in terms of guarantees for “the whites” when they met. This lack of clarity on the documents shared with Smith would later end up causing problems for Kissinger, and for all parties at the Geneva Conference later in 1976.

Before Kissinger’s second trip to Africa, the basis for a constitutional conference was proposed by Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere. Writing to Crosland on September 12, 1976, Nyerere explained his decision to back the idea of a constitutional conference, now that the Americans were involved, but he warned that such a conference would be difficult. The lack of unity of the Zimbabwean leaders was one reason. But Nyerere was hopeful that the task of negotiating independence would bring them together. Nyerere also offered Crosland an outline of how independence could be achieved, including an agenda for a future constitutional conference. Nyerere’s proposal is worth examining in full, because in many ways it became a blueprint for what eventually transpired. Nyerere emphasized that his proposed steps needed to follow a specific order: first, a “Constitutional Conference is held in London, between Britain and the Rhodesian Nationalists.” This conference, according to Nyerere, “should seek to reach agreement on: (a) an independence constitution; (b) the setting up of a Provisional Government; (c) the date for independence.” The second step would be removal of the Smith regime to create “an African majority Provisional Government – similar to that of the ‘Chissano Government’ in Mozambique from September 1974 to June 1975.” This would lead to the “ending of the war and the lifting of sanctions simultaneously with the assumption of effective power by

RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–77, Box 18, Memcons, September 76, folder 4, NARA II, 9. Also Document 02075, DNSA.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the Provisional Government.” In turn, that would lead to “preparations for elections to be held before independence,” and finally to independence.⁴²

As had been clear from Nyerere’s April meeting with Kissinger, Nyerere had Mozambique’s recent transition to independence as his working model for the Zimbabwean process. At the Geneva conference, Britain’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Ivor Richards, who would run the conference, would make an important deviation from Nyerere’s suggestions by setting the date of independence as the first substantive agenda item. This effectively permitted a great deal of posturing that led to stalemates between the negotiating parties. Interestingly, the Lancaster House conference in 1979 would start with the constitutional negotiations first, which helped guarantee a successful negotiation. But in September and October 1976, all parties were very far from such a successful outcome.

Kissinger’s Pre-Geneva Shuttle Diplomacy

Kissinger and South African prime minister John Vorster met for dinner on September 4, 1976, at the Dolder Grand Hotel in Zurich accompanied by a large entourage of their own. Kissinger asked Vorster for his views of Kaunda.⁴³ Vorster said he and Kaunda “got on very well,” and that there were “two Kaundas – the one addressing his people, and the other doing business.” Kissinger asked which of these the real Kaunda was, and Vorster said he didn’t know, “because the African is the most natural actor ever created.” Kissinger went along with this by saying Vorster had “disillusioned him” because Kaunda “was in tears after my Lusaka speech.” Vorster then said Kaunda found his Idi Amin joke very funny when the two met for the first time. Vorster retold the joke to Kissinger, a play on words in which Amin ordered that the country be renamed Idi after him, and one of his advisors, “a wise man – one of the few wise men left” – said,

⁴² Brown from Dar es Salaam to FCO (telno 322), September 12, 1976, “Letter from Nyerere to Secretary of State Crosland,” September 12, 1976, item 376, FCO36/1832, BNA.

⁴³ Memcon Vorster, Muller, Fourie, van den Bergh, Amb. R. F. Botha and Henry A. Kissinger, September 4, 1976, Dolder Grand Hotel Zurich, Switzerland, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–77, Box 18, Memcons, September 1976, folder 1, USNA II, 1.

“Mr. President, you shouldn’t do it.” Amin asked, “Why not?” and, the wise man said, “There is nothing wrong with Idi. But it has just come to my attention that there is a country called Cyprus, and the people who live there are called Cypriots.” Vorster added that when Kaunda heard this joke, “I’ve never seen a man laugh so hard in all my life.” Kissinger responded, “But they’re all great actors. It comes natural to them,” which was met with laughter. The rapport between the two men was now firmly set, and the internationally besieged South African prime minister could trust the US secretary of state. The two had built a bond around a racist trope about Africans, one they were willing to make at the expense of President Kaunda – the leader who had worked so hard to bring Vorster and Kissinger together to pressure Smith and the Rhodesians in the first place.

The meeting finally began to discuss Rhodesia. The leaders were briefed on the Frontline State presidents concerns over the ability of the Zimbabwean nationalists to unify for talks and were told that the “boys with guns” would not cooperate with the political leadership’s position in any future negotiations. Kissinger interjected to say that the “boys with guns” phrase was his. He had used it in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and claimed that President Nyerere had taken it from that testimony and was now using it. The briefing suggested that all the Frontline State presidents were of the opinion that further conflict was likely more realistic than peaceful negotiations at this point. Kissinger asked William Rogers, the under-secretary for economic affairs, to brief the South Africans on American ideas regarding plans to keep whites who could help in Rhodesia. Rogers summarized what was called an “international scheme for support for the transition in all its dimensions.” This meant that the fund would provide support for “improving the lot of the blacks, and training the blacks for management.” It also meant lifting sanctions and encouraging the World Bank to become involved in finding investors, and lastly, providing “assurances for the whites who can make a constructive contribution to the future of the country.”⁴⁴

Vorster asked if “they think they can run a sophisticated economy like Rhodesia, or do they realize they need the whites?” Rogers said the Frontline State presidents agreed with the American position that “whites have a role and should stay,” and described a plan developed

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

with the British to offer “compensation in the case of expropriation” with “assurances in four areas: Pensions . . . Housing, . . . farms, [and] . . . some right to transfer and liquidate assets.” All such “guarantees would one way or another be underwritten by an international effort led by the British.” Kissinger interjected to say that it was “paradoxically . . . easier for us to get money from Congress for a fund organized by Britain than for one organized by the United States Government.”⁴⁵ Kissinger added that perhaps Rhodesian industry could set up an “international consortium” that would contribute to this fund, with the United States and Britain acting as “guarantors of this fund, instead of us putting money in.” This was thought as a way of incentivizing the plan from the perspective of white industry and an African government. Kissinger mentioned an amount that, as will be seen in further discussions on compensation in Geneva and at Lancaster House in 1979, would remain remarkably consistent. Speaking of the plan, Kissinger concluded, “Our obligation is the same in either case. But if we have to earmark \$500 million now to Rhodesia, it will lead to endless debate. If we only commit ourselves to the fund, with no amount because some will be generated locally . . . [sic]”⁴⁶ After Kissinger finished describing the plan, Botha compared it to “an insurance policy” and Kissinger agreed. “We’d like to handle it like an insurance policy rather than as a cash payment. It is better for our public than buying out the whites.” “And for Africa,” Muller added, and Vorster commented that “the Rhodesians would take exception if it were worded that way.” Kissinger asked if they would accept it. Vorster said they would. “It would be regarded as a challenge to both black and white Rhodesians.” Fourie asked, “But if the GNP doesn’t go up . . . ,” to which Botha answered “. . . there would be the insurance.”

Kissinger continued to describe the plan. “And it doesn’t cost the black government unless they start kicking whites out. As they force the whites out, they lose some. If there is a mass exodus, the guarantee fund would pay directly, and they would lose the investment. It is designed to create maximum incentive.” South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hilgard Muller, interjected that “It seems to be very cleverly devised,” and Kissinger said, “We pay money into a fund that either goes to the white settlers or the black government.” This concept of “safeguarding” of whites by forcing a future black government from forcing the whites out is a clear example of “race states” in the Cold War. The rationale

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

behind it was that the Americans and British wanted to devise a scheme that could use development aid as a way to ensure the continued influence of whites in the economy, government, and military aspects of Zimbabwe. The reasons for even contemplating such a move had to do both with bringing Smith and the whites to the negotiating table, but also in a sort of imaginary of what black African states were capable of, or not capable of, based on what the western powers had observed elsewhere, particularly in Mozambique and Angola.

Vorster then commented, "The first question the Rhodesians will ask is: 'Is the money just a promise, or is it really there?'" Kissinger hedged a bit and then added, "I'll be honest. I don't think money will be really there until the next session of the Congress." Vorster pressed a bit further to know what amount the Americans were discussing so he can tell the Rhodesians. Rogers tried to hedge a bit more and Kissinger interjects: "You [Rogers] said \$1.3 billion. This is considered low by our people." Muller said that the Rhodesians have also made calculations, and Kissinger stated "Theirs are higher." "For God's sake let's accept the higher," Vorster replied to laughter. After a discussion of how it may be easier to get contributions from other allies, Vorster told the Americans, "You understand there won't be a contribution from us." Here Kissinger challenged Vorster a bit, saying that the British had hoped the South Africans would do it symbolically. Vorster replied emphatically, "My answer is a decided no. It is impossible – for psychological, economic and political reasons. It will be seen as literally selling out and buying out." From Vorster's perspective, he thought that the position was "becoming very embarrassing and even self-defeating to some extent," and that the Rhodesians were saying "everyone talks about them and no one talks to them" and "getting very touchy." Vorster told Kissinger that South Africa "cannot be seen to be deposing Ian Smith," and that "the Rhodesians can depose him but not us." The US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, William E. Schauffele, Jr., along with Kissinger, then proposed the idea that South Africa's main role would be to guarantee that Smith could not spin out of any agreed "caretaker" or "interim" government, to which Vorster replied, "That's a horse of a different color."⁴⁷

Kissinger emphasized to Vorster and to the other South Africans present that his main priority in this diplomacy was to change the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

direction of negotiations so that should the Cubans and Soviets become directly involved in Rhodesia, the United States would not find themselves defending Smith. Kissinger suggested that the financial guarantees had another motivation: “I hate to say . . . What we’re doing is preventing Communist foreign penetration into Rhodesia.” Kissinger said, “We might be terribly lucky; I’m not doing it with illusions.” He argued that even if the Rhodesian were to win the war, that could also bring the risk of “foreign intervention,” which they wouldn’t be able to resist, given their “domestic situation.” He then made the case that once he is out of the picture, the Carter Administration may advocate for defending the region. “I personally think, even in defense of the whites, that foreign intervention must be resisted. But I must tell you I am the only senior official who feels that way – even in this Administration. I can’t even get the Pentagon to do contingency planning.” He then put forward that “a Carter Administration would not resist.” Implying that they would not make a stand against the Cubans and Soviets in Rhodesia. Rogers, however, interjected, “He might.” Kissinger ignored Rogers’ dose of realism and concluded, “I believe Cuban and Soviet intervention has strategic consequences that must be resisted, on behalf of everybody. If we do this and the blacks reject it, the moral situation is different.”⁴⁸ In a move that was typical of Kissinger’s negotiation style, he wanted the South Africans to know that he and the United States government did not care about Rhodesia *per se*, as long as the diplomacy could help put the United States in a better position *vis-à-vis* the Soviets and Cubans on the issue of supporting black rule. In terms of his hardball style, he wanted the South Africans to know that the United States would be fine if all they obtained was a commitment to majority rule that appeared to be brokered by Kissinger.

In terms of financial incentives, Vorster suggested that “if money was available to buy out land owned by whites, it will make a tremendous difference.” Kissinger, understanding that there was opposition to this as a plan to pay whites to leave, said, “But it would be a mistake to present the plan as a plan to buy out the whites and send them out of Rhodesia.” Rogers added, “It’s bad politics and bad economics.” South Africa’s ambassador to the United States and permanent representative to the United Nations, Pik Botha, replied, “Make it

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

available but don't force it." Kissinger ended by saying, "It would be the ultimate irony if all of it is done but it's rejected because the blacks can't get organized." Botha agreed. Kissinger concluded, "But still it must be presented. Because if it is rejected, we're in a much different position with respect to foreign intervention because it's not a fight against majority rule but against imperialism." Vorster replied, "Precisely."⁴⁹

Kissinger would discuss the theme of the economic incentives with the Rhodesian team when they met in Pretoria on September 19. Rhodesia's deputy prime minister and minister of finance, David Smith, first broached the topic of financial compensation, stating that these should be designed "[n]ot to buy people out" – an idea he'd like to get away from – but to "inject development capital." Kissinger agreed. "That is our idea. We have the assurances of the British, French probably, and Germany. Probably Canada." Ian Smith added, "This is important, because the last thing we want to do is force people out." Kissinger replied, "No, we want to keep people in, and it's morally important to us too." Kissinger was obviously playing to Smith's need for reassurances before he made a speech accepting majority rule in two years' time. Smith responded: "Young people will want to know what kind of life they have before them, or else they'll leave." Smith then related one of his consistent themes: "If we're asked to commit suicide, people will pack up and go." Kissinger joked: "Are you going to tell the Rhodesians the U.S. asked you to commit suicide?" After some laughter, Ian Smith retorted, "I hope I'll be more tactful than that."⁵⁰

From the American perspective, progress was made, as Vorster agreed to help corner Smith into accepting responsibility for promoting what Kissinger called "a proposal like this [Annex C], with an early timetable and outside guarantees, and a fund." Vorster made one more

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger, Ian Smith, et al.," RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–77, Box 18, Memcons, September 76, Folder 4, NARA II, College Park. For further details on the financial compensation plans, see Sue Onslow, "Race and Policy: Britain, Zimbabwe and the Lancaster House Land Deal," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45, no. 5 (2017), 844–67; Timothy Scarnecchia, "Proposed Large-Scale Compensation for White Farmers as an Anglo-American Negotiating Strategy for Zimbabwe, 1976–1979" in Arrigo Pallotti and Corrado Tornimbeni, eds., *State, Land and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 105–26.

comment: “The final point for me is that it’s immoral for me to do it.” Presumably this was in the context of not wanting to be responsible for bringing Smith’s government down. In the end, Kissinger had Vorster’s assurance that he would help commit Smith to the following: “a new government in two years, moving to an interim government when the process is completed.” The program included “the guarantees in Annex C, plus economic guarantees.” They agreed that both the United States and South Africa “will guarantee that Smith will carry it out.” Interestingly, after Kissinger first indicated he was willing to make this public, Schaufele stated, “It will be known that it is the proposal we have been talking about.” Kissinger said, “It may not be desirable.”⁵¹ This is a small point, but one that would later become a larger issue between the Americans and the British in the crucial weeks before the Geneva conference. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Selling Kissinger’s Initiative to the US Congress

A few days after Ian Smith had gone on Rhodesian television to announce he had accepted the Anglo-American invitation to negotiate toward majority rule in two years’ time, based on guarantees from Kissinger to protect Rhodesian white interests, Kissinger still had to convince the US Congress that what he was trying to do was worth their support. On September 28, Kissinger, along with President Ford and then-CIA director George Bush, briefed a bipartisan group of congressional leaders on Kissinger’s negotiations in southern Africa. Kissinger asked Bush to give the group an intelligence report before making his own comments. Bush explained, “Assuming nothing were done it was our assessment that it would be 1978, at the very maximum, when we would witness the end of white control of Rhodesia by force. The Black Governments which would emerge from the conflict would be more attuned to communist influences than governments brought through negotiation.” Bush added, “The Rhodesian

⁵¹ Memcon Vorster, Muller, Fourie, van den Bergh, Amb. R. F. Botha and Kissinger, Eagleburger, Winston Lord (Director, Policy Planning Staff), Schaufele, Amb. William Bowdler, Peter Rodman, NSC Staff Meeting, September 4, 1976, Dolder Grand Hotel Zurich, Switzerland, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–77, Box 18, Memcons, September 1976, Folder 1, 15.

Government was already under siege and the radical governments which we saw emerging from the violence would be beholden to outside communists.”⁵² This bleak Cold War prognosis was seconded by Kissinger, who argued, “The whites in Rhodesia will be overthrown within two years. There is also the risk that South Africa would be forced into the conflict by public opinion. It is our view that communist intervention would then be certain.” He also predicted that the “only way Rhodesia can defend itself is through incursions along neighboring borders” and that “these countries will respond by asking for communist aid.” Kissinger argued that these cross-border conflicts “will tend to radicalize their countries,” and these increasingly radicalized countries “would then surround Zaire and could lead to an entire bloc in southern Africa hostile to the United States.” Doing his best to prove the importance of his shuttle diplomacy to US interests, Kissinger concluded that “a successful resolution of the situation of southern Africa by force will not be lost on the countries” of the Middle East. Kissinger then commented on the complexity of the southern African negotiations compared with his Middle East shuttle diplomacy. “The difference between the negotiations here and the Middle East is that in Middle East there were two parties who had an agreement in principle. In southern Africa we have four front line states plus Angola. Among these five there is considerable distrust amongst each other. We also have four liberation movements which are severely divided.”⁵³ This conversation also conveyed Kissinger’s overriding concerns before Geneva. He wanted to push forward with a negotiated settlement to avoid a possible scenario where the United States would be forced to be on the side of Smith in fighting against the Cubans and Soviets, or a situation where a war would radicalize Zambia and allow the Soviets and Cubans to defend Zambia from Rhodesian attacks.

In contrast to the confidence the Americans had in their plan, Ian Smith was beginning to show his characteristic signs of “wiggling off the hook.” A week after Smith’s September 24 speech accepting the concept of majority rule, he sent a message to Kissinger, Crosland, and Vorster conveying his deep concern about the way the Frontline State

⁵² Memcon, President Ford, Henry A. Kissinger, William E. Simon, George Bush, Bipartisan Congressional leadership, September 28, 1976, Cabinet Room, White House, NSA Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford President Library, 2–3

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

presidents were promoting Mugabe as a potential leader for negotiations. Smith warned that since his speech, there had been a “marked change” in public opinion. This has been caused mainly by the militant and the intransigent attitude of certain black presidents and by the statements of nationalists such as Mugabe of which you are no doubt aware.” Smith also warned that the lack of unity among the nationalists was a “forewarning of coming power struggles.” He warned that should the Frontline State presidents promote Mugabe “as a leader of the African nationalists, the effect on public opinion, both among whites and among blacks, will be extremely serious.” Referring to Mugabe’s “long record of Communist affiliation” and recognizing Mugabe as “now emerging as the apparent spokesman of the terrorists based in Mozambique,” Smith claimed that the intentions of the Frontline State presidents was “to establish a Marxist-type military dictatorship in Rhodesia on the model of that of Mozambique.” “It appears that in this aim they have the full support of President Machel.” His message ends with a warning: “Unless steps are taken urgently to reverse the current trend of loss of confidence among white Rhodesians, the position will deteriorate and there will be a real danger of a collapse of the economy and of the whole complex structure of government and of the security forces. If this should happen the Western powers who have forced Rhodesia into this situation will bear a heavy responsibility.”⁵⁴ Smith’s warnings came as the stage was set for the Geneva talks between Smith, the African National Council factions led by Muzorewa and Sithole, Nkomo’s ZAPU, and Mugabe as the tentative political leader of ZANU.

From Kissinger’s perspective, after two visits to Africa, he was confident that if all went well in the proposed negotiations, Nkomo would likely be the first leader of Zimbabwe. Even Nyerere seemed to have left Kissinger with this impression when they had met on September 15 in Dar es Salaam. Nyerere had briefed Kissinger on the difficulties of bringing Nkomo and Mugabe into a united front, but he was optimistic that the two movements could be unified. Discussing possible scenarios, Nyerere described to Kissinger a two-part solution: “(a) the present government should go in favor of an African government,

⁵⁴ Telegram from the Embassy of South Africa to the Department of State, Pretoria, September 30, 1976, 1629Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States. Volume XXVIII 1969–1976 Southern Africa*, item 213, p. 638.

and (b) a constitutional framework for the white minority and majority rule in 18 months to two years." Nyerere let Kissinger know that he had already discussed this possibility with Nkomo and Mugabe. "I explained this to Joshua and his colleagues, and to Mugabe – though I was not so specific as with Joshua. I asked 'supposing we can get this, would they be ready?' They obviously were excited. Their problem is to get together."⁵⁵

By the time Kissinger met with Nkomo in September, however, Kissinger began to refer to Mugabe as a possible rival to Nkomo for nationalist movement leadership. In their second meeting on September 17, Kissinger, who greeted Nkomo with "Hello Mr. President!", asked Nkomo about the potential for continued fighting after independence. "When the black majority government is formed, will the other groups continue fighting?" Nkomo asked, "Which other groups?" to which Kissinger replied, "ZANU." Nkomo explained that he and Mugabe were fighting together. "We are fighting in alliance with ZANU. When we form a majority government, we expect the FLS [Frontline State] Presidents to support that government. Whoever fights them isn't fighting for majority rule, but for personal reasons. The black Presidents won't support a personal war." Kissinger then asked Nkomo, "Speaking candidly, do you think it will be you?" Nkomo replied, "I am the leader of Zimbabwe." Kissinger's reply to Nkomo must have been emphatic to warrant an exclamation point in the transcript: "That settles that problem! We have always worked on that assumption."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Memorandum of Conversations, Henry Kissinger and President Julius Nyerere, September 15, 1976. State House, Dar es Salaam, Memcons, September 1976, Folder 2, RG 59, NARA II.

⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Henry Kissinger and Joshua Nkomo, September 17, 1976, File: NODIS Memcons, September 1976, Folder 2, RG 59, NARA II.