



## Case Study

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# War Veterans and Violence in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** An outline of Zimbabwe's violence and war veterans' issues is given in this document. The study illustrates the scope, prevalence, and repercussions of the different roles that veterans of war and veterans of violence play in transitional cultures. Demobilization, demilitarization, reintegration, and rehabilitation procedures were not carried out correctly in Zimbabwe, as shown by militarized masculinity and its effect on violence. Conflict occurred in Zimbabwe at several points between the 1980s and the beginning of the 2000s. Part of the larger transition from war to peace was the development and implementation of post-conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) for former war veterans. However, DDR failed to accomplish this goal in every instance, and within ten or so years after its deployment, there were varying security and stability repercussions. It is more likely that war veterans may turn to violence if there is no comprehensive psychological reintegration program to help them cope with the psychological trauma of the conflict and change their expectations and attitudes.

**Keywords:** Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reinsertion, Reintegration, War Veteran

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## INTRODUCTION

Unquestionably, the failed DDR in Zimbabwe made war veterans more likely to participate in various types of violence throughout the country's transition from conflict to lasting peace. "Suggest many former war veterans lack basic education, marketable job skills, and for some, the social skills needed for successful economic and social integration," the World Bank, which is a major provider of technical and financial assistance to governments planning and implementing demobilization and reintegration processes, notes in survey data for DDR cases. According to Bandeira (2008), the vast majority of combat veterans lack personal belongings, are unskilled, typically have numerous dependents, and lack home or land. There is no denying the need for assistance among the former combat veterans. They need humanitarian aid since they are now jobless after the war, they have lost time and chances while fighting to free their country, and they want to better the lives of their family members.

Before the war ended, war veterans' prestige, income, and security would have been based on their military prowess, equipment, and weaponry. War veterans need reintegration help because of how easily they may relate to their wartime history and the challenges of facing uncertain civilian careers. War veterans who are not effectively disarmed and reintegrated may go on committing crimes and may die of a violent mindset at an advanced age. War-related mental stress may also affect former soldiers. Reintegration in post-war environments presents social and psychological stresses that worsen their mental

health issues (Ball, 1997). Furthermore, a hyper-masculine society often wins out during wartime. A feeling of macho physical strength, personal invulnerability, and a high degree of emotional desensitization to violence are all characteristics of the masculinity that veterans adhere to. Along with psychological hardship, these battlefield dispositions might cause combat veterans to resort to different types of violence during the transition from war to peace.

Bandeira (2008) states that the United Nations observed that war veterans lost their generation when they were young because they had been denied access to education, jobs, and training during the conflict, experienced trauma from the war, developed alcohol and drug addictions, and relied solely on violence and weapons to survive. They will probably find it difficult to adjust to civilian life after losing their military source of income. Male ex-veterans may act antisocially in their families and communities, which fuels a rise in social and economic violence, particularly sexual violence. Such violence may be prevented by successfully reintegrating former combat veterans into society via specialized psycho-social services.

### Former war veterans and violence in the Southern Africa region

According to Kingma (2000), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) area demonstrates how badly designed and executed DDR procedures have led to old war veterans engaging in a variety of violent crimes, mostly to get compensation from the government. In other instances, the violence was organized based on a shared identity, representative

veterans' groups, and/or ties to the governing party, according to evidence from southern Africa. The 'governments that had failed to properly reintegrate former war veterans later found themselves with a price to pay, as restive ex-fighters threatened national stability. The absence of clear information, counselling and referral systems negatively impacts the briefing and orientation of former war veterans former war veterans at discharge, and support for them throughout the reintegration process. In addition, the community and families that are meant to absorb the former war veterans may not be well-primed to do so.

Namibia's successful disarmament and demobilisation was undermined by the independence government's failure to plan and implement comprehensive reintegration programmes (Baden, 1997). The high expectations for a comfortable post-independence livelihood vanished amongst many disenchanted ex-members of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) who failed to reintegrate fully into Namibian society (Kingma, 2004). The euphoria of the return from exile, the elections and the excitement over independence were replaced by varied socio-economic hardships and vices including depression, alcoholism, and suicide and in certain instances, recourse to violent behaviour. The threat to national security and stability posed by the unemployed and frustrated PLAN ex-fighters solidified in public disruption and rioting for welfare support (such as cash payments), employment and recognition from the government. In 1995, a large number of ex-PLAN fighters marched on the Presidential and Prime Ministerial offices. More serious protests took place in July 1997, coinciding with similar protests by veterans in Zimbabwe. Protests continued throughout Namibia in 1998. For instance, in July 1998 unemployed ex-PLAN fighters from Okahao and Outapi embarked on a 'march for jobs' to Ondangwa Airport calling on the government to help them secure employment (Mashike and Mokalobe 2010).

Dzinesa, (2006) postulates that in South Africa, one time gratuity payments, a counselling and advisory service, and a Service Corps training scheme failed to provide sustainable reintegration for former war veterans. Unsuccessfully reintegrated former war veterans engaged in small scale protests to highlight their grievances. As early as August 1993, 27 unemployed and disenchanted former members of the African National Congress's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), staged a 10 day sit-in at the ANC's Durban offices to demand welfare support, paralysing its operations. In November 2000, about 100 unemployed MK and Azania Peoples Liberation Army (APLA) ex-fighters demonstrated in the Western Cape, and on 17 August 2002 some former war veterans joined the Social Movement Forum protest against the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (Sadomba and Dzinesa, 2004). While the protests inside South Africa may have been diminutive in nature, South

African former war veterans and veterans have had a negative impact on the broader regional stability. South Africa was the major regional supplier of mercenaries to war zones such as Angola. The transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was accompanied by the exodus of many South Africa Defence Force SADF soldiers disinclined to be part of new defence forces. This, together with the disbandment of counterinsurgency units such as 32 Battalion, the Koevoet (crowbar) unit and the later withdrawal of both white and black personnel from the new military force, resulted in a niche-source of mercenaries.

According to Rupiya (2007), Mozambique's reintegration strategy, whose major component was a two year long cash compensation programme known as the Reintegration Support Scheme (RSS), succeeded in 'paying and scattering' the demobilised soldiers.<sup>16</sup> After two groups of former war veterans were formed to advocate for their members, the former combatants have often voiced their dissatisfaction.<sup>17</sup> There were intermittent riots in 1996 by former combatants protesting unemployment and the demand for war compensation. Only 5,000 of the 22,000 registered Renamo ex-fighters were entitled for pensions by April 1999, which is enlightening.<sup>18</sup> But more importantly, some of Mozambique's former war veterans have shown that they are capable and ready to act as change agents and supporters of nonviolence. Propaz (For Peace) is an organization founded in 1997 by former soldiers from the insurgent Renamo and the government Frelimo party. Volunteers from the organization assist local communities in resolving disputes amicably in six of the nation's provinces (UNDP 2000).

By 1990, up to 25,000 former war veterans were jobless in Zimbabwe due to programmatic and institutional shortcomings in demobilization and reintegration. In order to advocate for official recognition, welfare assistance, and their own relevance in a post-conflict society, the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) was established, giving the former war veterans an institutionalized framework and a forum (United Nations, 2006). As a result, the designation of ex-military personnel as "war veterans" solidified. Concurrently, a certain militancy gradually developed as ZNLWVA aimed to glorify and acknowledge the liberating responsibilities of its members (Nilsson, 2007). The former combatants would strategically align themselves with the governing ZANU PF party and use their "war veterans" persona to accomplish their political and economic goals, often via violent methods. Krieger contends that the "power seeking agendas, their appeals to the revolutionary liberation, their use of violence and intimidation," as well as the "simultaneous conflict and collaboration as party and veterans manipulate one another," have marked the relationship between the ruling ZANU PF and the war veterans for generations.

After troublesome reintegration, the government's suspension of a war victims' fund—which had grown to be the most crucial means of escaping poverty for former veterans—created a volatile situation. Soon after, the government was at odds with irate veterans who staged rolling protests against what they saw as mistreatment and bureaucratic bungling (UNIDIR 2000). Stopping at the gates of the presidential residence (State House and Zimbabwe House), protesting outside the presidential offices (Munhumutapa Building) during a cabinet meeting, protesting at the African-American Summit, and interfering with Heroes Day celebrations at the National Heroes Acre were some of the ugly protests that took place in Harare. In the 2000 legislative and presidential elections, as well as in the violent land reform program, war veterans (and party youth) played a significant role as the spearhead of the governing ZANU PF party's electoral campaign. In the nation's present unclear post-election crisis, where many suspected opposition supporters have allegedly been bullied and even assassinated, ZANU PF has apparently conveniently mobilized sections of the same people (Werbner, 2008).

The reintegration strategy of the Zimbabwean government, which included providing pertinent information to former war veterans, was not widely and regularly carried out. Pre-discharge orientation and the creation of a database of former war veterans were not effectively accomplished during the many idle months that they remained at the assembly sites awaiting integration and demobilization. The government program's lack of clarity, inability to gather their socioeconomic profiles and career goals, and absence of practical assistance and monitoring systems were all bemoaned by former combat veterans. These shortcomings led to impacted fighters' unsustainable reintegration and subsequent participation in protests.

As they deal with the horrors of the past, former combat veterans in transitional countries inevitably suffer mental difficulties. Anger is one of these issues, as are relational problems, distrust, stress, melancholy, and difficulty adapting to family life, as well as PTSD symptoms including nightmares and flashbacks (McMullin, 2004). In light of this, highly militarized and traumatized former soldiers may pose a danger to the communities in which they are placed. Crime and aggressive attitudes have been among the effects in South Africa. Due to the absence of formal psychosocial rehabilitation programs and the high expense of professional and clinical psychosocial care, the majority of former combatants in South Africa turned to peer support or traditional assistance, sometimes with unfavorable outcomes. Others sought solace in booze, which often makes matters worse.

Without psychological therapy, there are several instances of former war veterans in Zimbabwe, both male and female, turning to alcohol misuse as a

coping mechanism for their stress. Due to the chronic nature of the pressures experienced during the conflict, women who have served in the military continue to have negative psychological responses and behaviors. Victimization via murder, torture, and rape are among them, as are the indirect consequences of being uprooted, losing one's house or property, family dissolution, poverty, and disease. Accordingly, only 15% of the population could afford them in 2002. The majority of sufferers of psycho-trauma were therefore unable to get professional help. In all three instances, the frustrations resulting from difficult social and economic reintegration worsened the dire psychological circumstances of the former combat veterans. Strong physical prowess, personal invulnerability, and a high degree of conquering are characteristics of the militarized masculinity paradigm that raise the likelihood of ex-combatant violence.

According to the World Bank (2008), it was not helpful for reintegration programs to lack appropriate counseling tools to change aggressive wartime male identities. In Zimbabwe, political violence and torture were documented during the elections and riots in the Midlands and Matabeleland, when young members of the governing party and former war veterans acted with hyper-masculine vigilance. Rape and other forms of violence were also committed against women. Male veterans of war may be seen as perpetrators of violence against this background. On the other hand, men who had been inadequately reintegrated into society after serving in the military and did not fulfill the masculine role of providing for their families were more likely to abuse alcohol and perpetrate domestic violence. A lack of psychological rehabilitation and past male military situations may be equally important factors in explaining South African ex-fighters' propensity for aggressive and violent behavior. Domestic abuse also affected women who were former war veterans in Mozambique and married their male equivalents (Farr, 2003).

As discussed elsewhere in this paper, former war veterans' demands for support and compensation from the state, which they believe they are entitled to, can sometimes be violently expressed when they unite behind a common war veteran identity and/or representative body. Certain segments of the ex-combatant population experience exclusion from the 'correct' identity, which is another expression of the aforementioned relationship. Armed conflicts broke out between the two antagonistic groups at the troop assembling places as a result of the inability to disarm ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters who were awaiting integration. ZIPRA fighters saw subsequent government efforts to disarm the fighters as inconsistent and intended to strengthen the military might of former ZANU leaders. In the Midlands and Matabeleland, several of these former ZAPU war veterans subsequently participated in violent dissident activities. They turned become peace spoilers rather than veterans of the conflict. Only with

ZANU and ZAPU adopting the Unity Accord in 1987 did the two areas' lack of a shared national war veteran identity and the ensuing bloodshed cease (United Nations, 2006).

In the Angolan case, former UNITA soldiers did not classify themselves as fully 'civilianised' more than three years after the conflict had formally ended in 2002. It is notable, however, that holding on to their military identity a personal identity perception of not being fully integrated has not translated into the perpetration of violence. Gender as a source of identity had an important link to (perceptions of) the outcome of former female combatants' reintegration in Zimbabwe and Namibia. As shall be seen later, Zimbabwe typifies how identity according to gender can determine the outcome of women ex-fighters' reintegration. Despite the vital contribution that women fighters made in the liberation struggle, some of them were not eager to take up the war veteran identity against the backdrop of a gender insensitive demobilisation and reintegration policy, and unfriendly community perceptions. Many female combatants self-demobilised in the 1980s, apparently to expedite the severance of ties with a traumatising military past a choice that carried the weight of self-reintegration in a patriarchal society that viewed them as having played unfeminine roles. These women were candidates for PTSD and the related negative consequences. Similar negative perceptions had a comparable impact on women in Namibia.

The lack of specific support for certain groups, such women and the handicapped, may cause the worried former war veterans to commit violent crimes, according to evidence from Southern Africa. There was no gender consideration in Zimbabwe's demobilization and reintegration strategy. In the DDR process, women who had served in the military were not seen as unique and significant participants. This meant that, in comparison to their male counterparts, female ex combat veterans had more difficulties reintegrating into society. Additionally, no long-term, targeted measures were made for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the physically handicapped former combatants with particular requirements. When a National Rehabilitation Center for former war veterans was suddenly closed to them in 1985, it had no clear direction and had not yet reached its full potential. Due to their unemployment and disability, the disgruntled veterans of the war were more likely to resort to antisocial behavior.

The government-designed DDR programs in Zimbabwe did not include the society that former war veterans had to reintegrate into. The government's introduction of a war veteran's compensation package may have led to the perception of former war veterans as a special group, which may have contributed to a hostile relationship between them and the general public. On a more personal level, there were instances when the new circumstances were difficult for both families and

returning handicapped soldiers to handle. Former war veterans with disabilities who were furious and disillusioned by the lack of acceptance in their communities turned to aggressive and antisocial behavior, which resulted in hostile assaults against them. An ignorant and uncaring general public, together with patriarchal gender relations, played a part in the exclusion of female former combatants. Additionally, certain societal segments were uncompromising to female ex-fighters. Due to the societal assumption that women performed unwomanly liberation war duties and because they were seen as being too independent, gruff, uneducated, and unfeminine to be suitable husbands, several female former war veterans experienced barriers to recovery. According to the United Nations Security Council (2000), the majority of female veterans of war who returned with fatherless children were rejected by their own families and lived as misfits who resorted to drug and alcohol misuse for comfort. The government did not provide them with any special aid.

The transitional period after a peace deal in Zimbabwe was marked by violent conflict, with former war veterans acting as perpetrators of violence. The ZANU PF had reserved ZANLA cadres as a strategic force outside of specified troop gathering places, and they engaged in an unlawful electoral campaign of violence and intimidation in the lead-up to the Commonwealth-supervised independence elections. From 1981 to 1987, armed dissident activity occurred in Matabeleland and portions of the Midlands, with some former ZIPRA warriors taking up weapons against the government as a result of the immediate post-independence inability to disarm former war veterans awaiting reintegration. Gukurahundi, which is Shona for "the rain that washes away the chaff from the last harvest, before the spring rains," is the name of the specially formed North Korean-trained 5th Brigade and the integrated army forces that the government deployed in response to this internal security issue. Before ZANU and ZAPU signed the historic Unity Accord in 1987, violence and instability shook Matabeleland and portions of the Midlands, resulting in an estimated 10,000 civilian deaths and thousands more injuries during the 5th Brigade's campaign (World Bank 1999).

## CONCLUSION

The intervention of ZANU PF, which imposed obedient and compromised people as war veteran leaders—some with questionable liberation war credentials—complicates the rehabilitation and reorganization of war veterans. The inability of senior army commanders with flawless liberation war credentials to submit to such leadership upon leaving the defense forces was deemed inexplicable by this article. The involvement of all legitimate and self-respecting combat veterans in the political and economic activities of the nation is severely limited. To protect the principles and objectives of the liberation struggle—freedom, democracy, social justice, respect for human dignity, and



peace—war veterans must rise above party political interests and take on a leadership role. As the foundation of an ordered society, war veterans should be the first to defend against violations of these inviolable human values and advocate for respect for the rule of law. Veterans took pleasure in the idea of independence throughout the war as they fought to free our nation. Veterans of the war felt that emancipation could only be achieved by hard work and not by outsourcing the fight.

Veterans of the war should keep up their hard work and solid work ethic, and not expect to gain what they don't deserve or harvest what they didn't sow. Certain former combat veterans are inherently prone to different types of violence, such as domestic and criminal abuse, should they fail to effectively reintegrate into society. An analysis of the experience in southern Africa demonstrates a connection between the participation of former war veterans and veterans in violence in transitional societies and deficiencies in DDR procedures. Since violence involving former war veterans continues to occur in many of these nations over ten years after DDR was drafted and put into effect, the transitional period has been extended. The defining of the transitional period's timelines therefore presents a significant difficulty. Even though Zimbabwe has seen specialized study, it is evident that more empirical studies and in-country surveys are needed to better understand the problem of violence and former war veterans in southern Africa.

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