

3 PRIME MINISTER

The attached report

from CGS is disappointing.



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14th August 1980

*In view of CGS's report we  
will have to consider very carefully  
whether we want to be associated  
with a well-nigh impossible task.  
I don't want failure to be a*

ZIMBABWE: COMMAND OF THE ARMED FORCES *request to succeed*

*(Attached)*

My Secretary of State has read with interest CGS's report on his visit to Zimbabwe which, I believe, has also been shown to Lord Carrington. It is clear that there are formidable difficulties in the way of the successful amalgamation of the three forces in Zimbabwe into a new national army. Mr Pym has nevertheless been encouraged to note that a good start has been made, and that the British Military Advisory and Training Team is making an effective contribution, and deserves most of the credit for the progress so far.

As to the possibility of a British General being appointed to succeed General Walls, Mr Pym agrees with CGS that we should not grieve if Mr Mugabe decides on another appointment, or no appointment at all. We must hope, however, that Mr Mugabe's decision does not have the effect of undermining white confidence, or lead to a further exodus of officers and NCOs from the former Rhodesian Army, whose experience and expertise could be vital to the success of amalgamation and the efforts of our training team. It is by no means certain that Mr Mugabe will opt for a British appointment. If he does, however, we are committed to respond positively, and CGS has already suggested three British Generals who might be suitable. Since he did so the position has changed somewhat: General King has decided that he does not wish to be considered; CGS has concluded that General Blair

R M J Lyne Esq





would not be altogether suitable; and Mr Mugabe has stipulated that whoever is appointed must be demonstrably senior to the Army and Air Force Commanders who are three star, and whom he would supercede. This latter consideration affects the position of Major General Strawson, whom CGS still believes would in every other respect be a most suitable choice. In practice, therefore, of the three names submitted to Mr Mugabe only Major General Strawson remains a credible runner.

Against this background, Mr Pym believes that we must be ready with one or two additional names if Mr Mugabe turns to us. He is advised by CGS that we have exhausted the possibilities among retired officers, and he believes that we should look again at the possibility of our suggesting a serving officer. Given the demands of the job it may be that a younger man would anyway be more appropriate. A serving officer could do the job on either loan service or contract terms, although in the latter case he would have to resign his commission for the duration of his appointment. The CGS is, therefore, considering whether any serving officer other than General Kitson would be suitable and could be made available.

Having seen for himself the situation in Zimbabwe, CGS believes that General Kitson would in fact be the best British candidate for the job. He acknowledges that General Kitson's public image could create presentational difficulties both for HMG, and for Mr Mugabe, and he agrees that this consideration should be fully and frankly put to Mr Mugabe if General Kitson's name were proposed. On this basis, Mr Pym is disposed to agree that General Kitson's name might be suggested to Mr Mugabe if he decides on a British appointment, but he



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would obviously wish to be reassured that Lord Carrington was of the same mind.

I am copying this letter with CGS's report to Nick Sanders at No 10, and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely*  
*Richard Dawson*

(J D S DAWSON)



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ZIMBABWE NATIONAL ARMY

REPORT BY CGS

1. During my five day visit to Zimbabwe I have spoken at length to several representatives of all three military elements, and seen former Patriotic Front (PF) soldiers at various stages of their training for amalgamation into the Zimbabwe National Army. I have been dismayed by the complexity and difficulty of the task of amalgamating the three until recently warring factions into one Army.

2. I do not say that the task is impossible, and I acknowledge the start which has been made which is both ingenious and imaginative. Given a moderation of hard line attitudes on the part of certain elements in both the old Rhodesian Army and ZANLA (ZIPRA could well prove to be more reasonable and more easily absorbed), there may be something significant to show by the end of the year, which is the date actually set by Mr Mugabe for the completion of the exercise. However, the short term problems are immense and for the following reasons I think they may be incapable of a clear-cut solution:

a) The hard line attitudes are well established and I cannot see them moderating much, even when subjected to the skilful and persuasive influence of a successor to General Walls who is a "mover of mountains";

b) The sheer numbers involved threaten to overwhelm the infrastructure of the former Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF), on which the new army must depend in the first instance, and which is a wasting asset as white officers and NCOs opt in significant numbers to leave the Army. BMATT is providing indispensable help, but it is fully stretched in the training role. There are still thousands in the assembly areas and appear to be more to come, either from training overseas or former bases in Mozambique. There is a danger of administrative chaos which could lead to further frustration, resentment, ill-discipline and might result in mutiny;

c) Accommodation for the newly formed battalions does not exist except in the form of insufficient tentage. A start is only now being made in providing permanent



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accommodation, and it will be a long time before living conditions will be adequate for new units, let alone approach the standard of the existing army accommodation. This already causes resentment and disillusion among the former PF and could accelerate or bring forward the eventuality mentioned in (b) above. Furthermore, when units of the old Rhodesian Army are eventually amalgamated with ZANLA and ZIPRA - as they must be - they will have to be removed from good barracks where they are united with their families and sent without their families to bases where the accommodation is rudimentary at best to join up with what to many of them will be uncongenial company;

d) The white leadership of the former RSF, most notably the Army Commander General Maclean, seem determined to resist for as long as they can the amalgamation of RSF units with ZIPRA and ZANLA, and to maintain a Praetorian Guard against the possibility that the political settlement will founder on the radicalism of some elements of ZANLA or rivalry and resentment between Shona and Ndebele. For the time being, and at least until more barracks can be built and ZANLA and ZIPRA have settled down together, this has put paid to attempts to establish the new army on the basis of 1/3rd, 1/3rd, 1/3rd from each of the three constituent forces, although there are signs that the few black officers and greater number of black NCOs from the former RSF are worried they will lose their chances in the new army if their participation is too long postponed.

e) Commander Rex Nhongo of ZANLA rejects the idea of a new army based on British lines of organisation and discipline, and extolls instead the virtues of a politicised army modeled on the armies of those countries which supported the PF in its "armed struggle", and receiving financial and training assistance from those countries, in addition to, or instead of, from the United Kingdom.

These problems, any one of which could by itself be solved, mitigated or circumvented, add up to a formidable obstacle to progress with the essential task of amalgamating the three armies.

3. If amalgamation is taken too fast there is a real risk that the white element of the former RSF will withhold even minimal co-operation and resign leaving the new army without any of the technical and specialist expertise which will be vital to successful amalgamation of the three forces into one sizeable National Army. In that eventuality the administration of the Army would collapse and the Government would have no efficient force on which to call if things go wrong and the fears are realised of a clash between ZIPRA and ZANLA..



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4. If, on the other hand, amalgamation is taken too slowly and confined at this stage to ZIPRA and ZANLA, which is the wish of the former RSF commanders, and which is the major complaint of both ZIPRA and ZANLA, there is a real chance Mr Mugabe will conclude that the spirit of the National Army is not being observed and the only answer is to disband the old regiments and concentrate on the new ones. He said as much during my second meeting with him. This would not only produce alarm and despondency in many quarters, but would deny opportunities to those of the old RSF leadership who wish to stay on, particularly black officers, warrant officers and NCOs, to contribute their badly needed expertise to the new army. 11

5. I personally believe that more must be done and be seen to be done to bring the former RSF into the amalgamation process, and that this should be the first priority of any successor to General Walls. However, I think it will be more difficult for an outsider to achieve who is seen to have no long term stake in the country, and is thought not to have to suffer the consequences of the action he takes to complete amalgamation within the tight timescale necessary for political reasons, but far from ideal if a sensible military solution is to emerge. The power of the former RSF leadership to stall, procrastinate and sabotage this action should not be under-estimated. Against this background I am inclined to think it possible that at least as much progress would in the event be made and with less recrimination against us if no successor were appointed to Walls and things were left to a combination of Ministerial pressure, hard bargaining within the joint command to find the acceptable levels of tolerance, and the efforts of the head of BMATT to jolly everyone along, who might be upgraded to Major General to give him more clout. It will be interesting to see how things work during the interregnum Mr Mugabe has decreed, when Mr Page, who is the Secretary for Defence and a Civil Servant, will chair the JHC.

6. On the possibility of our providing a British General to succeed General Walls I conclude, therefore, that it is a matter of finely balanced judgment whether we want to be associated with a task which at the best will be extremely difficult for an outsider, whatever his calibre, and at the worst may end in tears. If Mr Mugabe decides not to have a retired British officer, and assuming, which I think it is fair to do, that he will not appoint Nhongo, I believe we should breath a sigh of relief. We are making an invaluable contribution in the form of the BMATT, and we should just have to hope that the good influence we can exert through that instrument will combine with good luck and the rather naive enthusiasm of the young PF guerrilla to become soldier, to overcome the problems.



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7. If, on the other hand, Mr Mugabe does ask for one of our nominees, we must try and persuade him to take the job. At the same time we must stress again to Mr Mugabe, as I have already done, that whoever is appointed must be acceptable to all the military parties, must be given authority over them, and must enjoy Mr Mugabe's full support. In addition, the new man must have regular access to Mr Mugabe, be free to speak frankly about the realities of the very complicated military situation, and have discretion to adopt a flexible and practical approach to implementing the plan for a new national army.. It was the lack of this authority and discretion which eventually frustrated General Walls and contributed to the reasons for his resignation.

30 July 1980

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