

6 *Negotiating Independently*

1978

With all the efforts at international diplomacy in 1977, the parties were in 1978 still far from the goals of a negotiated ceasefire and transitional government. The Frontline State presidents and the Anglo-Americans had hoped the internal settlement talks would bring the PF to the negotiating table in order to avoid being left out. At this stage, the prospect of “splitting” the PF seemed to be worth a chance from the point of view of British foreign secretary David Owen but not necessarily from the point of view of the Americans or the South Africans. Why Owen would think Nkomo would drop Mugabe and work directly with Ian Smith is an interesting question, which reveals much about how the FCO tended to view Zimbabwean nationalists through the lens of ethnicity. Perhaps it was their detailed knowledge of Zimbabwean nationalist politics, including waves of infighting and intrigues during the mid-1970s that led the British to continue to emphasize ethnic loyalties when forecasting the prospects for Nkomo and Mugabe. This approach led to the view that Nkomo’s ambitions to be Zimbabwe’s first prime minister, along with his minority ethnic status, were at the heart of the competition between ZANU and ZAPU, rather than personal political rivalries. Nkomo’s explosive responses to media reports suggesting the PF could not create unity because of ethnicity shows something about his aversion to analyzing everything through ethnicity. He believed that he had earned the right to be in the top leadership position in the PF because of his seniority to Mugabe and his greater international diplomatic experience over the years. He also believed that ZAPU and ZANU could form a political alliance before the first national elections that could lead to his victory. In a press conference following the Malta meetings on February 1, 1978, Nkomo and Mugabe were “[a]sked whether they would enter the elections as a united party (and) they affirmed that they would.”¹ Of course,

¹ Fm Valletta to FCO, “Mugabe and Nkomo Press Conference,” February 1, 1978, item 144, FCO36/2122, BNA.

Nkomo likely had sufficient reason at this stage to believe Mugabe would not honor this pledge.

Malta Talks: The Americans, the British, and the Patriotic Front

The Malta talks of January 30–31, 1978, were organized primarily in order to reassure the PF that the premise of the Anglo-American proposal was still the foundation for future negotiations, regardless of the internal settlement talks going on in Salisbury. In their approach to Malta, the British were particularly keen to try to use the internal settlement talks as sufficient leverage to get the PF to back off of some of their more adamant pre-settlement demands. An interesting FCO draft briefing for the Malta meeting spelled out the strategy, which was premised on the notion that if the PF remained intransigent, then at some point, they would “have to step back” and would be “unable to prevent Mr. Smith from pursuing his internal settlement initiative to its logical conclusion.” This strategy understood that should such an internal settlement materialize, “whether or not it constitutes a genuine handover of power, [it] will exclude the PF and will ensure that the war goes on.” The prognosis for such an eventuality was not a positive one. “If this happens, and the PF eventually fought their way to power, the Zimbabwe that they would take over would be economically and politically exhausted and the degree of bitterness between the races and different nationalist factions would have increased immeasurably.”² It is worth considering how this strategy proposal at this stage in the negotiations reflects a consistent position maintained by the British in terms of race. Because the PF had made it clear that it would not stop fighting once a puppet “black” government were installed and internationally recognized, the pressure on the PF, so this reasoning went, would be that they were now fighting a “civil war” between black Africans and not a “race war” in Rhodesia. The problem with this racialized reasoning is that the PF leaders did not see their fight for power strictly as a racial one. The struggle was now more personal about who would gain the ultimate goal, to obtain and maintain political control of the new state as experienced in Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, and Tanzania. The nature

² Barlow to Graham, “Rhodesia: Talks with PF in Malta: 30–31 January 1978 Steering Brief,” January 26, 1978, item 86, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

of the one-party state in southern and central Africa gave the PF the model for a future Zimbabwe.

The same FCO document made a pitch for dividing the PF: "It may be possible, if Mugabe is clearly the hard liner, to separate him from Nkomo. But there is little hope of this. The ideal objective would be to bring Smith and Nkomo together. This is probably only possible for Nkomo within the framework of our proposals."³ Graham made a similar comment in his pre-Malta briefing, emphasizing "the need to pressure the PF, and if Mugabe continued to remain uncooperative, then to try to form a new party with Nkomo who could step in and accept an offer."⁴ As will be shown in the remainder of this chapter, Owen would push for this split, while the Americans remained less convinced of the efficacy of such a plan. So what progress, if any, came from the Malta talks? First, the talks helped to officially bring the PF leaders into formal mediated talks where both ZAPU and ZANU were forced to outline a common position. The talks also permitted Owen and US ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, to take over from the failed Geneva initiative and keep the United States and Britain involved in negotiations. This is an interesting contrast to the Geneva talks period in 1976 where it was Kissinger, the US secretary of state, pushing for talks, and the British ambassador to the United Nations, Ivor Richard, who was not as enthusiastic about Britain's role at the time.

Just before Malta, Owen, learning from the severe criticisms he had received from the PF leaders over his earlier remarks, made two public statements of Britain's support for the Anglo-American proposal and his doubts about the internal settlement. In a press statement provided to the *Daily Express*, Owen remarked that if the internal settlement produced results, that would be a positive note, but as far as they could tell at the time, "the plans proposed in the Salisbury talks would be unlikely to bring about a peaceful settlement and therefore unlikely to be recognized internationally. There must be international acceptance because the UN must recognize a settlement if sanctions are to be lifted."⁵ The previous day, January 25, 1978, Owen had addressed

³ Ibid.

⁴ J. A. N. Graham, "Rhodesia: Future Policy," January 17, 1978, item 62, FCO 36/2121, BNA.

⁵ Owen to Press Officers, "Rhodesia: Pre Malta Scenario," January 26, 1978, item 123, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

parliament on the objectives of the Malta talks. In addition to stressing the “full support of the U.S. Government” for the talks, Owen emphasized the role of elections in determining the legitimacy of the transfer of power in Zimbabwe. Owen was clearly speaking to Mugabe and Nkomo when he emphasized the need for any settlement to include “all parties,” and that anything short of this would not be recognized as legitimate. Owen added, “Moreover, a settlement which did not involve all the parties could hardly bring peace to this troubled country.”⁶ His statement in the House of Commons helped to encourage the PF to meet again in good faith.

Still, even with Owen’s concession to Mugabe’s demand to publicly state his opposition to the internal settlement, none of the participants entered Malta with much optimism toward a settlement. The British complained that the PF position was too extreme. For example, the British believed the PF leaders were insisting on control of the transitional government in order to block the influence of the “internal” nationalists such as Bishop Muzorewa and to guarantee their control of the post-transition government. The PF leaders were opposed to United Nations observers and peacekeepers, which had to do with a carry-over from the Congo experience, and to how Nkomo and Mugabe remembered the role of the United Nations military intervention there. At this stage, the PF were asking for full control of the police and military security before elections.

Given such formidable differences in starting points for negotiations, the British hoped that at least the Frontline State presidents were going to be more reasonable about a settlement. Owen suggested in his instructions to Frontline State missions before the Malta meeting, “We believe that the desire for a peaceful settlement and a sense of realism exist among the Front Line Presidents, despite President Kaunda’s idea, which he is no longer pressing, of postponing elections until after Independence.”⁷ This last point suggests that Kaunda had floated the idea of a complete transition of power to the PF before any

⁶ Owen continued, “I must make it clear that the Government, who alone can confer legal independence on Rhodesia, will not lend their authority to any settlement which fails to meet the criteria that I have described.” Owen to House of Commons, “Rhodesia: Draft Statement by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons,” January 30, 1978, item 127, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

⁷ Owen to Immediate Certain Missions and Dependent Territories, “Rhodesia: MALTA Talks with Patriotic Front,” January 27, 1978, item 97, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

elections were held, which may have been his way of envisioning Nkomo having any chance of becoming the first leader of Zimbabwe. But the pressure from Nyerere, the United Nations, and the Americans to use the international standard of elections as the necessary means to transfer power would eventually force Kaunda to drop the idea.⁸

The first Malta talks largely failed in moving the PF away from its previous position that it should control the transition period and control security forces during a transition period. Owen's accounts of the meetings, and the memorandums of conversations, show a lack of common ground, as the PF continued to insist that they, as the military forces carrying out the war, were the only Zimbabwean nationalist parties who could take part in a transition. Conversely, the British and Americans used the internal settlement talks to try to push the PF into making some concessions toward a more balanced negotiated transitional government plan. Nkomo reminded Owen at the Malta talks that Owen had previously assured the PF that the only parties qualified to negotiate were those involved in the fighting, therefore ruling out Muzorewa and others. Owen did not agree with this interpretation. Mugabe also pushed Owen to accept the idea that the PF would have to be in charge of the transition. Apparently, the PF's proposal suggested that five individuals serve in the transitional government, four from the PF and one from the Smith regime. The British later commented that they should be careful not to let this proposal leak, as "[i]t would be very damaging if they were thought to be acceptable to ourselves."⁹

Owen and Young challenged Mugabe and Nkomo to step back from their rigid positions. Mugabe told Owen and Young that the PF "would be satisfied with nothing less than a dominant role in the sovereign organ during the transition period. They would not accept a status subordinate to the Resident Commissioner." Owen "stressed that the choice lay between a settlement involving some compromise by the PF and the intensification of the fighting, together with increasingly vigorous efforts by Smith to promote an internal settlement. In the latter event the world would have to stand back." This obvious challenge to the PF to soften their demands was also supported by Andrew Young.¹⁰ He emphasized

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ W. K. Prendergrast, "News Department conversation with Mr Fergusson," January 31, 1978, item 140, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

¹⁰ Valletta to FCO, "My Tel no 44: Rhodesia: Talks with the Patriotic Front," February 1, 1978, item 137, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

the need for the PF to start negotiating directly with the Rhodesian military to pave the way for the removal of Smith. Young argued that “the Rhodesian Front were no longer fighting to preserve white rule but in order to ensure that the transfer of power came about peacefully. The Europeans [white Rhodesians] wanted a guarantee that Zimbabwe would not be torn by civil war over the next decade.” Young suggested the introduction of a “UN force” that would guarantee “law and order” and “undermine” the motive whites had for supporting Smith.¹¹

As difficult as the first Malta talks were, Owen came away optimistic that his plan to separate Nkomo from Mugabe in the PF remained possible. Owen reported that “Nkomo made no secret of his desire to get into talks with Smith. He also showed himself well aware of the fact that Mugabe, despite his qualities, is a liability to him.”¹² As this chapter will argue, Owen had a way of reporting what he thought would be the most beneficial outcome for the Anglo-American proposal. It is therefore difficult to ascribe motive to Nkomo based on Owen’s reporting alone.

Soviet Views of the Anglo-American Proposal

While Owen and Vance met with Mugabe and Nkomo in Malta in January 1978, British diplomats in Moscow were analyzing the Soviet’s interpretation of the Anglo-American proposal. British diplomat John Holmes once again offered his comments on media coverage from Moscow. This time, he referred to an editorial by Vladimir Kudryavtsev in the January 25 edition of *Izvestia*, where Kudryavtsev’s editorials were seen as reflecting Soviet foreign policy positions. Holmes believed this was the first clear expression of what the Soviets wanted to happen in Rhodesia. This included “the idea of handing over power to the PF, disbanding the Rhodesian security forces and leaving the Front to organize election afterwards.” Holmes commented “Kudryavtsev’s evident hostility to free elections can be left to speak for itself.”¹³ This Soviet view more or less coalesced with Nkomo’s strategy later in 1978 as he

¹¹ Valletta to FCO, “Rhodesia: Talks with the Patriotic Front,” January 30, 1978, item 129, FCO36/2122, BNA.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Holmes to FCO, “Nkomo in Moscow,” February 2, 1978, item 10, FCO/36/2203, BNA. Kudryavtsev’s editorial was also reported in the *New York Times*. “Soviet Bitterly Attacks U.S. Policy,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1978, 5.

attempted to negotiate directly with Smith. The goal then would be to obtain a surrender agreement that would turn over power directly to the PF without requiring elections first. Such a strategy would likely have been backed by the Soviets. However, for it to work, Nkomo would have to obtain cooperation from the Frontline State presidents and, most importantly, from Mugabe and ZANU. After Mugabe's consolidating power with those more committed to the "*tamba wakachenjera*" line, cooperation with ZAPU in any bilateral talks with Smith was unlikely to happen.

Holmes also reported information about Joshua Nkomo's visit to Moscow before the Malta talks, when Nkomo had joined a Zambian military delegation looking for military supplies. Holmes' source was a Zambian diplomat in Moscow, only referred to by the name Kunda, who relayed to Holmes what he had seen and heard during Nkomo's visit. Kunda appears to have been a source of intelligence on Zambian and ZAPU relations in Moscow, as the British tried to learn how much military support the Soviets were providing to Zambia and ZAPU. According to Kunda, "Nkomo had come [to Moscow] to put the seal on a promise the Russians had made on his last visit that arms supplies would be increased fairly substantially." Nkomo had apparently "been successful," as "Kunda thought new anti-aircraft missiles (he did not specify a type) were high on Nkomo's shopping list."¹⁴ These Soviet-made anti-aircraft missiles would later be used in September 1978, when ZIPRA would shoot down Rhodesian civilian aircraft. Holmes then describes having joked with Kunda "about it being difficult to fight a guerrilla war with tanks. Kunda took this seriously. Nkomo was very interested in obtaining Soviet tanks, although it was not clear whether the Russians were ready to supply any." According to Kunda, "while tanks clearly could not be used in a guerrilla war, if Nkomo had to fight another kind of war, for example to take over the country, there was an obvious use for them." Kunda added that he "had gained the impression that Nkomo was serious when he said he would fight a Black government in Rhodesia." Kunda told Holmes, "Nkomo felt he had a well-armed, well-disciplined and well-trained force. He was aware of the criticisms levelled at ZAPU for letting ZANU take the brunt of the fighting and had for this reason recently

¹⁴ Holmes to FCO, "Nkomo in Moscow," February 2, 1978, item 10, FCO36/2203, BNA.

sent some ZAPU units into Mozambique to mount operations from there (although independently of ZANU).¹⁵ Such intel might have given the British pause when thinking of Nkomo as their preferred leader for an independent Zimbabwe, but that would assume the British saw these negotiations and potential outcomes strictly through a Cold War lens. In reality, the British were most concerned in early 1978 with managing a transition that would require minimal British commitment in terms of taking formal responsibility for Rhodesia's decolonization process. For this reason, Owen in particular considered working directly with Nkomo outside of the Anglo-American proposal, at least in a scenario that would absolve the British of a longer commitment in terms of overseeing the transitional period as the former colonial power. For Owen and many British Rhodesia experts, Nkomo's connection to the Soviets was less of an issue than the knowledge that he, given his electoral disadvantage to Mugabe, would be more willing to directly work with Smith and the "Exco." This would relieve the British of what seemed the increasing likelihood that they would need to appoint a British governor to oversee elections and the transition to majority rule.

Internal Settlement Stalls Progress on Anglo-American Proposal Talks

Immediately after the Malta talks failed to move the PF position any closer to the Anglo-American proposal, Owen wrote to the British embassies and high commissions in the Frontline States to clarify his position on possible next steps. Owen told his ambassadors and high commissioners that the Americans wanted there to be a message from President Carter to the Frontline State presidents informing them of the results of the Malta talks, and to promise that the United States and Britain were doing everything possible to keep negotiations going. Owen thought it would be better if American and British diplomats did this "by means of oral approaches." He wanted his diplomats to relate that the Malta talks had reached an impasse. Owen told his southern African diplomats, "For us there is now no further room for concessions. It is extremely doubtful, however, whether the Patriotic Front will ever agree to make the compromises necessary to meet us."

¹⁵ Ibid.

Owen emphasized, however, that it was “vitaly important that we should give the Front Line Presidents no reason to doubt that we are making every effort, within the framework of our proposals, to meet the legitimate concerns of the Patriotic Front or that our objective remains to secure full agreement on that basis.”¹⁶ It would take until mid-March to meet again with Mugabe and Nkomo, this time at the FCO offices in London for two days of talks held on March 13–14, 1978.

Cyrus Vance, the US secretary of state, met with Nkomo and Mugabe on March 11, 1978. After asking the PF leaders for their assessment of the situation, they both complained of the “internal exercise” as being “repugnant” because Smith and the internal settlement represented “a regime not recognized internationally.” The PF leaders were upset that given this situation, “the U.K. had pronounced it a step in the right direction and this had been reiterated by the State Department.”¹⁷ Vance reportedly replied that “he had said that the Salisbury [agreement] represented a significant step because it had included universal suffrage, an independent judiciary, free elections and a date for Independence.” Vance then said that “he and Dr. Owen had expressed serious reservations on other matters.” He assured the PF leaders that he “would take the AAP as the yard-stick of propriety.” He wanted to know if the PF leaders were willing to meet in New York on March 20, with the intention of bringing the Malta participants (the PF) to meet with the Salisbury Exco (Smith, Muzorewa, Sithole, and Chirau). Nkomo told Vance that he “saw no basis for such a meeting.” Vance then “expressed regret” at this news and denied that they “were trying to get the PF to come on the basis of the Salisbury agreement.” Vance then called the Salisbury agreement “grossly inadequate,” to which Nkomo replied that it was “grossly illegal.” Nkomo’s position was that they were willing to talk with Smith, but he “did not want ‘loyalists’ in discussion of the ceasefire.”¹⁸

Mugabe similarly stressed to Vance that there could be no meeting with “civilians” until the military ceasefire had been worked out. Therefore, he did not want to meet again if the plan was to work out

¹⁶ FCO to Washington, “Telno 300 of 4 February, Rhodesia: Negotiations with the Patriotic Front,” February 6, 1978, item 2, FCO 36/2229, BNA.

¹⁷ Fm Washington to FCO, “My Telno 1025: Rhodesia,” March 11, 1978, item 218, FCO36/2124, BNA.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

military and political issues at the same time. He told Vance that he had his “suspicions that the Anglo-Americans were trying to marry the two” (the Anglo-American proposal and Salisbury), and that “there would have to be two stages, first bring the war to an end and then a constitutional conference,” with “no illegal marriages.” Nkomo added that the United States and Britain “should forget the meeting on the 20th.” The meeting was going nowhere for Vance, and he was called out of the meeting to speak on the phone with Nigeria’s foreign minister, Joseph Garba, a diplomat who was about to play a more significant role in his attempts at getting the PF to negotiate directly with Smith. When Vance returned from his phone call with Garba, he told the PF leaders that he “understood the PF’s position” and that he would be in touch. Mugabe ended the meeting with a criticism of the American position: “Mugabe said that he was puzzled by the U.S. role. They had been brought in by the British but were showing themselves sheepish and supporting the British right or wrong. Vance said that our [Britain and the United States] views had coincided all along.”¹⁹ Nancy Mitchell notes that this meeting had been alarming for Vance and his staff and resulted in American pressure on the British to jump start talks around the Anglo-American proposal.²⁰

Between the first Malta talks and this mid-March meeting in London, Smith and Muzorewa (along with Sithole and Chirau) had resolved their issues over the internal settlement. Officially announced on March 3, 1978, the internal settlement presented fundamental problems for the Anglo-American proposal negotiations, while causing major problems for Nkomo and Mugabe. Most importantly, the settlement, and Owen’s comments that it was “a step in the right direction,” caused the PF leaders to “take their gloves off” when Nkomo and Mugabe met with Owen and US ambassador to the United Kingdom, Kingman Brewster Jr., at the FCO on March 13. This two-and-a-half-hour meeting was one of the most contentious between the PF leaders and Owen. The pressure put on the PF by both the Frontline State presidents and the British had the effect of bringing Nkomo and Mugabe closer together, but also helped focus their shared annoyance at Owen and the British. The reason for their sharp criticisms at this

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and The Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 2016), 407–9.

meeting was that Owen, after Malta, had begun to float an idea of a new meeting between the PF and the new internal settlement leaders in New York. Mugabe and Nkomo both strongly objected to Owen on this point, arguing that the PF was still willing to work within the parameters of the Anglo-American proposal, which meant they would meet only with Smith and his military leaders to organize a cease-fire and discuss the mechanics of turning over power to a transitional government. They had no intention of meeting with the three African leaders in the new internal settlement. In fact, they refused to meet with them.

Owen claimed that it would be to the PF's advantage to meet with Muzorewa, Sithole, and Chirau because they were now linked to Smith, which gave the PF a stronger position inside Rhodesia. Nkomo and Mugabe dismissed this logic and were much more concerned that should the British agree to meet with the new "Executive Committee" (Exco), they were getting dangerously close to legitimating the internal settlement. The PF wanted nothing to do with it. The meeting got very heated at times and the minutes display the negotiation skills of Nkomo and Mugabe when they worked together effectively. Based on the meeting's transcript, Owen seems to have been unprepared for the level of mistrust the two leaders conveyed toward him. Owen, for his part, did not help matters by pressing the PF leaders on the possibility that talks with the Exco could happen, perhaps feeling that by being non-committal to their concerns, they would compromise. Nkomo and Mugabe were in no mood to compromise. They wanted the Malta process to continue and Nkomo especially continued to reiterate that the PF would only move forward within the Anglo-American proposal, and that they expected Owen and Britain to not engage with the internal settlement leaders.

Owen met with Nkomo and Mugabe once more on March 13, 1978. At this meeting, Mugabe criticized Owen for his comments that the Salisbury agreement had been a step in the right direction. Owen replied that President Carter had said something similar, but Nkomo interjected that Vance had tried to backtrack from that position. "Mr. Nkomo said that the PF would not abandon the nature of its conference to accommodate 'those people' as the result of an agreement reached in Salisbury. If, as a result of the Salisbury agreement, it was Dr. Owen's intention to abandon his own proposals, he should say so." Owen replied that "one had to live in the real world." Nkomo retorted

that “the real world could be anything one chose to make it.” This obviously upset Owen, who replied that he had been “much criticised at the outset of his time as a Foreign Secretary for saying publicly that he would have liked to get rid of Mr. Smith straightaway.” Owen then directly challenged Mugabe and Nkomo to stop criticizing him personally: “Now the PF spent their whole time having a crack at him. One day he would have a go at them. As a moderate Welshman, he had so far refrained from doing so.” Owen responded to criticism by claiming his ethnic difference within Britain, as if to show solidarity. After stating this threat, the conversation became good natured albeit revealing Owen’s frustrations, Owen told Mugabe and Nkomo: “The realities of life were that those who had been talking in Salisbury had come up with proposals which we believed to be inadequate and seriously defective but which, in certain areas, were what we and the PF had advocated.”²¹

Britain’s deputy under-secretary at the FCO, John Graham, provided his handwritten comments on Owen’s pessimistic summary of the meeting with the PF leaders. Graham’s comments encapsulated the problems the internal settlement had also created for the Anglo-American proposal and for the British in particular: “We have a dilemma. If the Front Line States were successful in putting pressure on the PF to accept our proposals as a package, we shall be asked to deliver, and we cannot.” In addition, Graham commented, “A meeting with the PF alone would be severely criticised at home, unless there were a parallel meeting with the Salisbury group. But the harder our position on the Anglo-American proposals, the less likely is it that Mr. Smith and his collaborators will attend a meeting, alone with the PF.” Graham then parenthetically suggested, “In fact the major incentive for Mr Smith to attend a meeting is the opportunity it would give to meet Mr Nkomo.” Graham was also aware that for the British to stall and do nothing in order to “await developments, though it may well be right, will go down very badly with President Nyerere & Co.” He could see “no alternative at the moment” but thought they “need not rush into it.”²² Graham and Owen seemed to have mutually decided to try

²¹ “Record of a Meeting between the FCO Secretary and the Leaders of the Patriotic Front at the FCO Office,” March 28, 1978, item 229, FCO 36/2124, BNA.

²² Laver to Graham, “Rhodesia: Talks with the Patriotic Front,” March 16, 1978, item 224, FCO36/2124, BNA.

to find a way to arrange direct negotiation between Smith and Nkomo. They thought that should the two leaders reach an agreement that would satisfy the international community and the Frontline States, this would find a way out of the dilemma Graham outlined above. Most importantly, a bilateral agreement could potentially relieve the British of having to take extensive control and responsibility for the transition, as emphasized in the Anglo-American proposal.

Owen had already talked with Nkomo about the idea of meeting with Smith directly when they met at the American Ambassador's residence on January 30 in Malta. Owen said that he had "urged Mr Nkomo to consider a meeting with Mr Smith. Mr Nkomo had agreed that this might be a possibility and that, if it were to take place, it could only do so within the framework of the Anglo/U.S. proposals." Owen also reported that Nkomo had been "very realistic about his chances and about Mr. Mugabe, to whom he adopted an attitude mixed between paternal and patronizing. He had made clear that he did not think that he could break from Mr Mugabe."²³ This last point is significant, because as will be shown in this chapter, Nkomo's critics would later characterize his August 1978 private meeting with Smith as an effort by Nkomo to split the PF.

A major pressure on the British, however, that kept them from letting the war take its course and hoping for a settlement between Smith and Nkomo, was that the Frontline State presidents, especially Machel and Kaunda, continued to have their countries attacked by Rhodesian forces targeting ZIPRA and ZANLA forces. This brought a certain urgency to Western diplomacy because the West was unwilling to supply defensive weapons to either Zambia or Mozambique to defend themselves from Rhodesian attacks. There was, therefore, always a possibility that the Soviets and Cubans could provide the more sophisticated weapons and expertise necessary for air defence, or for ZANLA or ZIPRA to take large-scale counter actions against civilian targets in Rhodesia. If the latter were to happen, the fear was that the South Africans and perhaps the Americans would have to join the war to defend Rhodesia. The South Africans were, of course, already providing most of the supplies and even personnel supporting the

²³ Graham to Rhodesia Department, "Private Meeting between the Secretary of State and Mr Nkomo on 30 January 1978," February 2, 1978, item 155, FCO 36/2122, BNA.

Rhodesians. Smith and his military commanders would continue to use airstrikes and “hot pursuit” strategies in Mozambique and Zambia to try to weaken ZIPRA and ZANLA through the last years of the war.

Bishop Muzorewa’s War of Words with Samora Machel

Given that the internal settlement would soon place Bishop Muzorewa in a position of leadership that involved authorization of military raids against ZIPRA in Zambia and ZANLA in Mozambique, it is important to understand the animosity Muzorewa, Sithole, and others held for Presidents Kaunda and Machel. One dimension of this already existing animosity is found in the claims made by Muzorewa, as described in Chapter 3, that he and the Reverend Sithole had tried to reach the camps in Tanzania and Mozambique in 1976 to assert their leadership as United African National Council leaders, but were blocked by the Mozambicans and the Tanzanians. In March 1978, the Mozambican president, Samora Machel, asked the British and Americans to find someone who could secretly contact Muzorewa and deliver a letter asking him to reconsider his decision to join the internal settlement. The Americans found Dr. William J. Foltz, a Yale University political science professor, who brought the letter to Muzorewa. Professor Foltz, on his way to deliver the Muzorewa’s response to Machel, reasoned with the US embassy staff that since Muzorewa didn’t seal the envelope, “Muzorewa probably would not object to the U.S.G’s [US government’s] knowledge of its contents.”²⁴ The full text of Muzorewa’s letter was then shared with the British, and is now part of the FCO’s record at the British National Archives.

Contained in Muzorewa’s reply, dated March 19, 1978, was a very impassioned account accusing Machel and Nyerere of having done all that they could do to keep him and others in the United African National Council from having access to ZIPA forces. Muzorewa complained to Machel that he received an invitation on September 19, 1975 “to go to Mozambique to organize the armed struggle.” He claims that he and others in the United African National Council, including its vice president, James Chikerema, were sent along with eight others with five lorries weighing seven tonnes each. “These lorries were filled with all

²⁴ Muzorewa to Machel, “Full Text of Letter on United African National Council Stationary,” April 3, 1978, item 21, FCO 36/2216, BNA.

the supplies people in the bush need – food, medical supplies and clothing for their cadres. But arriving in Mozambique some of our men were detained, others imprisoned and up to now some are somewhere in Mozambique.” Muzorewa complained to Machel that when he arrived he was surprised to discover that he too was under house arrest in Maputo. “I was further surprised to find that a High Command was being developed to take charge of the armed struggle without our knowledge and yet a massive majority of the cadres had been recruited by the UANC.” Muzorewa was accusing Machel and Nyerere of taking over the recruits he and the United African National Council had helped send to Mozambique. The Bishop complained that the current request for him to stay out of the internal settlement came too late, given that he had already entered the internal settlement deal with Smith. “I have listened to you and his Excellency President Nyerere’s advice in the past and therefore I feel that at this stage and time it was most unfair of you to withhold information of this communication until after I had signed an important agreement with Mr. Smith. Even though your advice has come too late.”²⁵

Muzorewa then listed the reasons why he did not regret having joined the internal settlement. First, he had succeeded in reaching a negotiated settlement, and, second, there would be real “one-man one vote” elections on December 31, 1978. He asked Machel, “What reason would the geurillas [sic] continue to fight for? Would they continue to wage a war of Liberation or a war to serve a personality?” The actual election would not occur until April 1979. Muzorewa refers to the notion that he and Smith, in the internal settlement, could end the war if only those in the PF were willing to turn in their weapons and join the internal settlement. The chances of this happening were, of course, very slim. At the end of his letter, Muzorewa declared:

I hope that we will never be put in a position whereas an independent Zimbabwe will fight independent Mozambique for the sake of individuals. If you are referring to the Anglo-American proposals which include Mr. Nkomo and Mr. Mugabe, then I would repeat that the door remains open for them to participate with us.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid. ²⁶ Ibid.

He signed off the letter “your brother in struggle . . . Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa President United African National Council.” Muzorewa’s suggestion to Machel about fighting in the future would hold true, as Muzorewa’s April 1979 Zimbabwe-Rhodesia government would continue to authorize military attacks on ZANLA forces in Mozambique and ZIPRA forces in Zambia.

The scenario of more war in the future expressed in Muzorewa’s letter to Machel pointed to a danger that the Americans and British thought might once again heighten the risk of Cuban and Soviet intervention in Rhodesia. The growing Cold War crisis in the Horn of Africa also influenced new concerns of a possible Cold War conflict over Rhodesia. This threat was discussed in a April 16, 1978 meeting in Pretoria between South African diplomats, Cyrus Vance, Andrew Young, and David Owen. As in previous meetings, the Americans and British wanted the South African’s advice on how to proceed, and to assess what levels of pressure the South Africans were willing to assert on Smith to move him to negotiate.²⁷ Owen started by expressing their concern over what the internal settlement would do to the Anglo-American proposal: “what worried him and Mr. Vance was that what had hitherto been a war between Mr. Smith and the black nationalists could, now that Muzorewa and Sithole were identified with Smith, turn into a fight between the nationalists.” Owen noted that should this happen, “it would be difficult to keep the parties in a negotiated posture in that situation.” He concluded with a fairly dire warning, “if that happened, each side would fight to the bitter end. The Front Line did not want to internationalise the situation and neither President Kaunda nor President Machel wanted the Cubans in.”²⁸

²⁷ Sue Onslow points to a key meeting in 1978 between Pik Botha, Fourie, and Owen in New York where Owen was “convinced . . . that the South Africans ‘had reverted to their old belief that Nkomo was crucial.’” Sue Onslow, “The South African Factor in Zimbabwe’s Transition to Independence,” in Sue Onslow, ed., *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 118. See also Stephen John J. Stedman, *Peacemaking in Civil War: International Mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974–1980* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), 145–48.

²⁸ “Record of a Meeting between the FCO Secretary, US Secretary of State and the South African Foreign Minister at the South African Foreign Minister’s Residence, Pretoria,” April 16, 1978, PREM16/1829, Part 28, BNA.

Owen then referred to Soviet and Cuban interventions in the wars in the Horn of Africa, and worried that the same could occur in southern Africa, although he did add that there could be some value in moving slowly, as "one could argue against bringing the sides together too soon." He added this was possible because "the PF were in no hurry and the Salisbury talkers were buoyant at the moment." Owen did caution, however, that as "the more present attitudes became set in concrete, the greater the danger of a battle between the nationalist groups."²⁹ Owen had summed up the situation from the Anglo-American perspective with one possible outcome being that the longer the internal settlement took hold, the chances would increase for a civil war between the internal government and the PF, rather than a race war.

Vance's response to Owen's statement showed a slight difference in interpretation. He "agreed with Dr. Owen that if there was breakdown and no settlement then there would be a black civil war. The chances of internationalization and of Cuban and Soviet involvement in such circumstances were very large."³⁰ While Vance also saw an increased chance for a "black civil war" as an outcome, he saw this as all the more reason to push harder for a negotiated settlement sooner because he believed that odds were greater for the Soviets and Cubans to intervene in such a potential "black civil war." Vance's argument was similar to Kissinger's argument back in 1976. For the Americans, they wanted to move quickly to avoid Soviet and Cuban involvement, but now, a few years later, the need was more to avoid a situation where the United States would have to get involved and take sides in a "black civil war" with Cold War consequences.

Pik Botha, South Africa's foreign minister, not surprisingly, shared the British view that patience was required. Botha had been promoted to foreign minister a year earlier. He was supportive of Muzorewa and the internal settlement, arguing that the new government could succeed in bringing the PF into government. Botha explained "that the PF could come in on an equal basis with no special seats reserved for them but the PF leaders should not be treated as Crown Princes."³¹ Such thinking fit well with South African ambitions for a similar internal settlement in Namibia.³² Botha agreed that a "black civil war" was a real

²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Ibid. ³¹ Ibid.

³² On South Africa's attempts to gain an advantage in Namibia, see Piero Gleijeses, "A Test of Wills: Jimmy Carter, South Africa, and the Independence of Namibia," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010), 853–901; Mitchell, *Jimmy*

possibility, and described to the Americans and the British what this might mean. “If there was a civil war it would be a tribal war. The war would not go through the middle of the country but would be on tribal lines, with Salisbury and Bulawayo at opposite poles. This would be much worse than a civil war.”³³ Botha then gave the Americans and British diplomats a brief history lesson about Nkomo and ZAPU: “There had been a time when, in South Africa’s view, Mr Nkomo would have been a better leader than the others but he did not seem to realise that there could now be a very terrible civil war if the people did not in fact like him. Mr Nkomo should have allied himself to Rev Sithole or Bishop Muzorewa but he had backed the wrong horse.”³⁴ Botha’s implication here was that Nkomo’s decision to stay within the PF had now saddled Nkomo to Mugabe, with no way out. Botha was also pushing a “tribalist” trope that already began to blame Nkomo for the future conflicts that he saw threatening in years to come. Interestingly, Botha seemed to be describing a war between Nkomo and Mugabe’s parties and armies, not between the PF and the Exco.

Young offered his own insightful comments on what he recognized to be the inability of the PF leaders to work together. “The PF were not a front. He had got the impression that while Mugabe and Nkomo got on well, Mugabe’s people thought Nkomo would join the internal settlement.” Young explained what he saw ZANU’s position: “They were therefore posturing to get Cuban and Russian support almost hoping that Mr Nkomo would sell out. President Machel and President Nyerere were trying to keep Mugabe within the plan.”³⁵ Young’s views summed up well the dynamics of the “Nkomo versus Mugabe” politics of the second half of 1978. As demonstrated below, the British would push Nkomo to try to negotiate directly with Smith for a settlement as a way of absolving the British of a more extensive political commitment to a transition under their command. The Americans would disagree with this strategy. As Young predicted, when the news of Nkomo’s meeting with Smith became public, ZANU tried to label him as a “sell out” for their own political gains.

Carter in Africa, 229–30; Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and Its Search for Survival* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 283–85.

³³ “Record of a Meeting between the FCO Secretary, US Secretary of State and the South African Foreign Minister at the South African Foreign Minister’s Residence, Pretoria,” April 16, 1978 PREM16/1829, Part 28, BNA.

³⁴ *Ibid.* ³⁵ *Ibid.*

Details from the diplomatic records, however, show that those secret talks were complicated on this point because Nkomo never abandoned Mugabe and the PF during the talks.

Nkomo had independently confirmed Young's perception of the PF relationship when he met with Owen on April 11, 1978, at 1 Carlton Gardens in London. According to minutes of the meeting, "Mr Nkomo admitted the difficulties of negotiating with ZANU but said that he did not want to split with ZANU since this would go down badly with the OAU." Nkomo predicted that a break in the PF would result in continued fighting by ZANLA, "and that even a small amount of fighting could create great problems unless President Machel intervened to cut off help from ZANU." Nkomo thought President Neto of Angola might be able to apply such pressure on Machel. Nkomo also said he was preparing to meet with ZANU in a few weeks. He mentioned "that the people imprisoned were all good people who wanted to bring ZAPU and ZANU together under Mr Nkomo's leadership." He said, "those were the people one could negotiate with whereas those like Tongogara (whom he loathed) . . . were hardliners." Nkomo told Owen that he "found Mr Mugabe easy to deal with and reasonable but Mugabe had been forced into the present position by the hardliners." Nkomo concluded that there "might be a moment when ZANU and ZAPU might have to split, but it should be a split of ZANU's making." The notetaker emphasized, "He [Nkomo] kept saying that ZANU were dependent on President Machel and that only he could cut them off." Nkomo also said that the problem with ZANU was that decisions were made by committee.³⁶

David Owen on Proposed Secret Talks between Nkomo and Smith

During the run up to the "secret-meeting" between Smith and Nkomo on August 14, 1978, David Owen relayed some of the problems inherent in such a meeting to the British Ambassador in Washington, DC on June 30, 1978: "The presence of [Joe] Garba and [Siteke] Mwale [the Zambian foreign minister] would probably be sufficient cover for Nkomo although, as Kaunda acknowledged, Nigeria is not a safeguard

³⁶ "Meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Mr Joshua Nkomo," item 300, April 11, 1978, FCO36/2126, BNA.

vis-à-vis the Tanzanians.” Owen indicated his desire to keep the British free of any responsibility for the secret talks: “But it would then be important still for us not to be directly involved in the meeting. . . . If the meeting produced results, Kaunda would probably have to consult his colleagues in confidence fairly urgently thereafter.”³⁷ Importantly, and in contrast to the “sell-out” narrative that would follow Nkomo’s meeting with Smith, Owen also indicated that he was instructing their representative in Salisbury to tell Smith that he would not likely be able to get away with splitting the PF.

[Redacted] representative will make the point that, in our judgement, an approach by Smith on the basis of splitting the PF and excluding ZANU completely would meet with a rebuff and that Smith will need to make an offer to Nkomo which the latter will regard as enhancing his chances of controlling, or at least neutralizing ZANU but not excluding them.³⁸

These instructions reveal Owen’s intentions to try to use the talks to give the upper hand to Nkomo, but this indicates his error in judgement that Nkomo was in a strong enough position to “control” or “neutralize” ZANU.

Owen instructed the UK embassy in Washington, and John Graham in Salisbury on June 30, 1978, to convey his “guidance on what might come out of direct talks between Mr Smith and Mr Nkomo and subsequently out of round-table talks.” Owen’s instructions also expressed his concern that there would be a potential American effort to get in the way. He told Graham, “You should not at this stage show the paper to [Stephen] Low.” He instructed that “Washington [the British embassy] should not reveal the existence of the paper to the State Department but I should be grateful for their comments on likely American reaction.” From this it would seem that Low, in his close work with Graham, was well aware of the potential secret talks, but that Owen didn’t want Low to know the details in order to void him alerting the State Department because of Secretary of State Vance’s likely objections.

In the weeks leading up to the secret talks, the British were worried that the OAU meeting on July 7–18 in Khartoum, Sudan, would decide to ignore the Anglo-American proposal and recognize the PF as the sole

³⁷ From FCO to Graham [Salisbury], “Telno 1673,” June 30, 1978, item 20, PREM 16/1831, BNA.

³⁸ Ibid.



Figure 6 Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo at the OAU meeting. Khartoum, Sudan, July 1978. Getty Images.

liberation movement in Zimbabwe. There was some optimism among the FCO's Rhodesia office that such recognition would not happen, given a report from Khartoum, based on the recommendations of the OAU Foreign Ministers, "calling for the involvement of all parties in a conference and stressing that the choice of leaders in Zimbabwe should be up to the people of that country." The advice was to make a statement that the Anglo-American proposal was still on the table, in order to encourage the OAU to continue to support it.³⁹ The final OAU resolution on Zimbabwe contained wording that "strongly rejects and condemns the March 3, 1978 Salisbury Agreement." The resolution did note that the African participants in the internal settlement were now tied to the racist regime of Ian Smith, stating that these parties "are now an integral part of the resulting treacherous and illegal Salisbury regime." The resolution also referred to the PF as "the sole Liberation Movement of Zimbabwe." But there was nothing directly in the resolution about rejecting the Anglo-American proposal.⁴⁰

³⁹ P. M. Laver, "Rhodesia: Briefing for Front Line Presidents," July 13, 1978, item 58, FCO 26/2229, BNA.

⁴⁰ OAU, "Resolution on Zimbabwe" CM/Res. 680 (xxxI), *Resolutions of The Council of Ministers Adopted at Its Thirty-First Ordinary Session and*

The Nkomo and Smith Meeting and the Subsequent Political Fallout

In Joshua Nkomo's 1984 autobiography, he summarizes the context of his 1978 meeting with Smith, emphasizing that Smith wanted to end the war at this point. "I found Smith a tired man, a battered man. He told me he wanted to surrender power, to hand the whole thing over; I am convinced that he knew the game was up, that the time had come to concede defeat. But I could not on my own accept his offer." Nkomo emphasizes in his autobiography that he refused Smith's offer until he could confer with Mugabe. "I told him that the important thing was his agreement to surrender power. But I also stated that the mechanics of the surrender was not something he could discuss with me alone. I had to bring in Robert Mugabe, my colleague in the PF: it was to the PF that power must surrendered, not to Joshua Nkomo or Zapu." Nkomo even refers to President Kaunda of Zambia as a witness: "Smith was critical of me: he asked President Kaunda why I was acting like that, did I not have the authority to settle? Kenneth, of course, supported my position that I could not finish the conflict on my own; it was the PF that mattered."⁴¹ Nkomo further explained that he and Kaunda enlisted Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo and his foreign minister, Joseph Garba, to help convince Nyerere and Mugabe that it was worth following up this first meeting with a second meeting to negotiate directly with Smith. Obasanjo tried to convince Mugabe of the efficacy of this strategy but in the end Mugabe and Nyerere refused to accept the need for any further direct talks with Smith during a Frontline States' summit in Lusaka in early September 1978. The idea that the British and the Nigerians planned the secret Nkomo-Smith talks without Nyerere knowing about them until September's Frontline States' meeting generally comes from British sources. Sources from the United States, however, show that Nyerere knew of the plan in August after the first meeting had taken place and was willing to support a second meeting as long as Mugabe participated.⁴²

Approved by The Fifteenth Ordinary Session of The Assembly of Heads of State And Government, 1978, 118.

⁴¹ Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo, The Story of My Life* (Methuen, 1984), 189.

⁴² From American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, "Rhodesia: President Nyerere Expresses Concern about Zambia-Nigerian-British Secret Negotiations with Smith," August 22, 1978, STATE215839, Central Foreign

The Rhodesians reported to their South African representatives that they had kept the meeting a secret, saying that “the leaks have come from their side and are highly inaccurate. The meeting was exploratory.” The account states that “After much sparring Garba eventually said Nkomo must have the preferential place as permanent chairman of ExCo during interim period.” The account says Nkomo agreed to this but “said he would not come in without Mugabe.” Smith reportedly “asked whether Mugabe would accept second fiddle to Nkomo.” The report states that “Nkomo said several times he would have no problem with Mugabe and was supported by Garba on this.” The report indicates Smith’s skepticism on this point: “PM expressed doubts and referred to Mugabe’s extreme statements re his future intentions.” It then goes over the plan to have Mugabe go to Lagos “to be ‘persuaded’ by Obasanjo, after which PM [Smith] would be invited back to Lusaka to meet Nkomo and Mugabe.”⁴³ This evidence from the Rhodesian archives helps to establish that Nkomo was not trying to make a deal with Smith on his own. However, it also helps to show that Nkomo and Garba, along with the British, clearly wanted to force Mugabe into a secondary role to Nkomo. This part of the deal was not to happen.

President Nyerere held a press conference after the September Frontline States summit in Lusaka to explain why he was against the continuation of the direct talks with Smith. He defended Nkomo’s resolve to keep Mugabe in any future equation during his meeting with Smith. “To his credit, Mr. Nkomo said he can’t go without his colleague of the PF. . . . Joshua insisted that he cannot go back without Mugabe.”⁴⁴ Nyerere reported that there had been some discussion at the secret meeting that if Nkomo could bring Mugabe to the next meeting proposed for Lusaka in a week’s time, Smith would bring Muzorewa, Sithole, and Chirau. And that if Nkomo was willing, they could reach an agreement without Muzorewa and Sithole, and it would

Policy Files, 1973–1976, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

⁴³ Secretary Prime Minister Salisbury to Rhodesians Pretoria September 189, 1978. “ADR from Gaylard. Your C. 312 Refers.” Smith Papers 4006 (M) 045. pdf.

⁴⁴ “Excerpts from President Nyerere’s Press Conference in Dar es Salaam Concerning the Lusaka Frontline Summit,” September 3, 1978, Doc. 580, in Goswin Baumhögger, *The Struggle for Independence: Documents on the Recent Development of Zimbabwe (1975–1980)*, vol. iv (Hamburg: Institute of African Studies Documentation Centre, 1984), 652.

be a transitional government with Nkomo, Mugabe, Chirau, and Smith. Such public revelations by Nyerere helped to discredit Smith and to demonstrate that the internal settlement leaders were already expendable. Nyerere's objection was that Nkomo, along with the British, Nigerians, and the Zambians, were willing to try direct negotiations without the other Frontline State leaders involved.⁴⁵ Mostly, however, Nyerere's strong opposition to these meetings was interpreted at the time as his preference for Mugabe and ZANU within the PF.

Nkomo, for his part, wasted no time in publicly attacking Nyerere for his criticisms brought out against Nkomo. On September 5, 1978, Nkomo's words from a BBC interview, reprinted in the *Zambia Daily Mail*, demonstrated Nkomo's anger with Nyerere for "interfering in the search for a solution to Rhodesia's problems."⁴⁶ Nkomo said, in response to Nyerere's statement that the talks had been "worthless," that "Nyerere is not the final authority on what may happen in Zimbabwe." Nkomo also did not rule out future meetings with Smith, saying that it depended on the conditions. "I would go if Smith said he wanted to give up and hand over power to the PF. It is our business to see that he does go. We are not fighting for the sake of fighting, but we want to convince these people that it is futile to continue." The *Zambia Daily Mail* article added, "Nkomo even went as far as to say that Nyerere was no longer one of the Front Line Presidents, since Tanzania had no common border with Rhodesia or Namibia."⁴⁷ As Nancy Mitchell argues, the American diplomats in Mozambique and elsewhere took the fallout from this secret meeting as a sign of Mugabe's growing popularity and that despite leadership struggles within ZANU, Mugabe was increasingly looking like the most viable leader for a future Zimbabwe.⁴⁸

Zambia's Mark Chona briefed the Americans on September 10, 1978, on the reasons for the fallout after the first meeting between Smith and Nkomo and gave his reasons why the second meeting never took place. His account is similar to Nkomo's in terms of Nkomo insisting that Mugabe be part of any settlement. Chona added, "Smith was, however, strongly opposed to Mugabe's inclusion.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lusaka to FCO, "Telno 585," September 5, 1978, FCO 36/2127, BNA.

⁴⁷ Ibid. ⁴⁸ Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa*, 493–95.

Nkomo said that was the only basis on which the talks could proceed. Smith agreed to meet with Nkomo and Mugabe, and a follow-up meeting was set for August 21 [1978].⁴⁹ Chona is more forthcoming about what happened after the first meeting in terms of Nkomo's behavior toward Mugabe: "Although Nkomo met with Mugabe after his meeting with Smith he did not tell Mugabe about the meeting. Only that the Nigerians wanted to talk to him about matters which he, Nkomo, was already familiar." Chona reported that "Nkomo did not tell Mugabe the purpose of the trip to Lagos was to pressure Mugabe to accept a number two position in the PF prior to the meeting with Smith."⁵⁰

According to Chona, when Mugabe went to Nigeria, Obasanjo put heavy pressure on him to accept a secondary role to Nkomo and to meet with Smith and start a Nigerian brokered settlement. Chona claimed that "although Mugabe told the Nigerians that the Nkomo meeting with Smith was 'a good thing' he resisted Obasanjo's insistence that he subordinate himself to Nkomo and argued that he had to consult his Executive Committee."⁵¹ After this, Garba accompanied Mugabe to Mozambique and to Tanzania to lobby Machel and Nyerere to pressure Mugabe to accept these terms. According to Chona's account of this, "Nyerere was 'enthusiastic' about the report on the meeting with Smith and sent Garba back to see Machel with instructions that Machel must 'send Mugabe to the meeting.'"⁵² Chona goes on to say that "Machel agreed and the Front Line Summit meeting was set up at Lusaka in order to coordinate a negotiating strategy for the PF-Smith meeting."

An interesting albeit brief confirmation of Mugabe having temporarily bowed to Nigerian pressures comes from a statement he made before boarding the plane from Lusaka to Maputo. The high commissioner reported the details of the press conference Mugabe held before he left for Maputo, in which Mugabe said that there would shortly be a general congress of the PF to "merge its two wings and elect a single leader." Mugabe said that "the Lusaka meeting had been mainly concerned with the mechanics of a one-party constitution and with

⁴⁹ From Secretary of State Washington DC to Ambassador Embassy Lusaka, "Conversation with Mark Chona on Rhodesia," September 10, 1978, STATE235989, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–1976, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

⁵⁰ Ibid. ⁵¹ Ibid. ⁵² Ibid.

the possibility of joint training in future for ZANU and ZAPU fighters.” He was then asked “if he anticipated problems over the leadership of a single party,” and replied in his standard way that it would be up to “the forthcoming congress to decide the question of leadership and to choose a Central Committee to lead the single Party.” He added that he “would not be bitter if he was not chosen.”⁵³ This brief reference to Mugabe accepting that there would be a merging of the military and political sides of the PF into a single unit only lasted until he was able to make it onto the plane. Once in Maputo, he was able to avoid the problem of having to become Nkomo’s second in command.

The public disclosure of the secret meeting between Nkomo and Smith produced a flurry of activity. The British were deeply concerned about what the Frontline State presidents would do at their meeting in Lusaka on September 2. There are a number of accounts of that meeting from foreign ministers that help confirm what Joe Garba had said in his accounts to the Americans. Primarily, Nyerere along with Mugabe were highly critical of Nkomo for having entered into the talks in the first place, even though, according to Kaunda and others, Nyerere was aware of the request to hold a meeting with Mugabe, and Garba had lobbied Nyerere to help make sure Mugabe would participate. The emphasis seemed to be that before the first August 14 meeting had become public knowledge, Nyerere was still supporting continued private talks. However, once the story broke, he became staunchly opposed to any further talks.

Mugabe’s ability to wash his hands of any role in the secret meeting was upsetting to the Zambians in particular, but also the Nigerians. Mark Chona described the change in Nyerere’s mind at the Lusaka Frontline States summit in early September. Chona told the Americans that Nyerere had pulled Kaunda aside to say that “Nkomo was the leader” and “only Nkomo could lead Rhodesia.”⁵⁴ He said that Nyerere changed his mind over the course of the meeting as the discussion showed the Nigerian effort was out of step with the Anglo-American proposal, and that once confronted with Mugabe and

⁵³ Lusaka to FCO, “My Telno 524: Rhodesia,” August 21, 1978, item 408, FCO 36/2127, BNA.

⁵⁴ From Secretary of State Washington DC to Ambassador Embassy Lusaka, “Conversation with Mark Chona on Rhodesia,” September 10, 1978, STATE235989, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–1976, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

Nkomo, Nyerere was unwilling to push for Nkomo's leadership as a condition for future talks.⁵⁵ Again, Chona's account has to be read through his own interests in getting Nkomo the top position in the PF. He told the Americans that privately Nyerere and Machel "both agreed that Nkomo had to be number one," but were "unwilling to take this position when they got into meetings and confronted the two Patriotic Front leaders directly."⁵⁶

George Houser was in Lusaka in early September 1978, and he met with Mr Punabuntu, a press representative at the State House, who was a former editor of the *Times of Zambia*. Punabuntu had also attended the meetings with Smith, Nkomo, Garba, and Kaunda in August. Houser spoke with Punabuntu on Kaunda's direction, as he had been told by Kaunda that Houser was a "trusted friend of Zambia" and that Punabuntu should talk with Houser "frankly" about the "Zimbabwe situation." Punabuntu told Houser that Smith had approached Kaunda and Nkomo to set up the meeting on August 14. Smith wanted Nkomo to join the internal settlement, but only after another Anglo-American conference had concluded. The idea was to obtain enough votes among the parties to elect Nkomo the head of the proposed Council of State that would lead the transition period. "There would be six participants and therefore six votes in such a conference. The idea was that Smith thought he probably could get Chief Chirau to vote for it. Nkomo would have to deliver Mugabe. That would be four votes because Smith would vote for Nkomo." Punabuntu went on: "The idea was to turn power over to the Patriotic Front, but Nkomo was the key to it. Smith had made clear that he really didn't want to deal with Mugabe. If Nkomo wanted to bring Mugabe along with him, that was to be his initiative." Punabuntu explained what happened following the meeting, confirming the account by Garba and others, that Mugabe was sent to Lagos where Obasanjo pressured him to accept a secondary role to Nkomo. Mugabe then went back to Maputo, where he and the ZANU executive decided not to accept the deal. Meanwhile, Nyerere turned against it and faulted Garba for not getting Machel's word, and only accepting Chissano's word.

Punabuntu told Houser that there were many more well-trained and disciplined ZIPRA troops than in 1975. Given this, "Punabuntu made it clear that they saw the only alternative to this kind of settlement as

⁵⁵ Ibid. ⁵⁶ Ibid.

civil war, eventually between ZAPU and ZANU.” He thought the conflict would grow internationally, mostly between the USSR and China, and he asked Houser “to try to do whatever is possible to get the US government to understand the situation in Southern Africa.” At this point in the point in their meeting, President Kaunda came to chat briefly with Houser. He and Mainza Chona, the new secretary general of the United National Independence Party, were working out plans for its upcoming conference in Mulungushi, which was to open the next day. Demonstrating the trust Kaunda had in Houser, Kaunda said that at the conference the party was to “choose their candidate for president and to devise a means by which [Simon] Kapwepwe and perhaps Harry Nkumbula would not be able to run.”⁵⁷

Houser also met with Robert Mugabe on September 23, 1978. He asked Mugabe about the Nkomo–Smith meeting, and Mugabe verified that “he had heard nothing about the meetings taking place with Smith until after the event.” Houser writes in his notes, “Nkomo hadn’t the courage to tell Mugabe about the meeting but only told him that it was important for him to go to Lagos.” When in Lagos, he was told what took place by Garba.⁵⁸

The US ambassador to Nigeria, Donald Easum, reported to the State Department the heated remarks Garba had for Nyerere once he heard that he had “flip-flopped” on the talks with Smith and the PF. Easum reports how Garba pulled him and British high commissioner, Sir Sam Falle, aside at a reception on September 19 in Lagos. According to Easum, “Garba cut loose a tirade against Nyerere, saying ‘[t]hat bastard, who does he think he is, playing God? We had it all wrapped up. He told me to go see Machel to get Mugabe on board. It had to be Machel, he said, because he didn’t trust Chissano. So I went to Maputo and Machel said he would deliver Mugabe.’” Garba said, “When we were in a hand’s grasp of pulling the whole thing off, Nyerere and his boys screw us all up. I am furious – I remain furious – and if I’d been there when Nyerere flip-flopped, so help me I’d have hit him.” Garba

⁵⁷ George Houser Africa Trip 1978 notes, September 7, 1978, 2–4 MSS 294, Houser Papers, MSU Special Collections. For the successful machinations by Kaunda’s allies in UNIP to exclude Kapwepwe and Nkumbula from the 1978 UNIP party election, see Miles Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 123–24.

⁵⁸ George Houser, “Houser Trip to Africa 1978 – Transcript of Notes,” September 9, 1978, Houser Papers, MSU Special Collections.

then told the diplomats that he was done working on Zimbabwe: "I've washed my hands of it, and I'm glad I'm out of it." He then tells Falle and Easum to report to Owen and Vance, and to tell them, "I'm damn sorry – I tried my best and we almost made it – we almost made it."⁵⁹ This quote is quite telling of the personal effort Garba put into his own shuttle diplomacy to try to bring the war to an end and to negotiate a settlement between the PF leaders and Smith. It would take another long year of fighting – fighting that became more intensive in terms of the already terrible human toll.

Nyerere told his side of the story to the British high commissioner, Peter Moon, and the US ambassador, James Spain, on September 4 after he summoned the two to his office once he had returned to Dar es Salaam from the Lusaka meeting. Nyerere gave his interpretation of the original secret meeting. He believed the Nigerians were behind the talks, as they had first tried to get Sithole to agree to meet with Nkomo, but he refused so they turned to Chirau, who agreed to meet with Nkomo in London. Garba then brought Mugabe to Lagos to meet with Obasanjo, and Obasanjo told Mugabe of the plan to meet with Smith. Nyerere then told the diplomats that Mugabe "had agreed provided Smith really was willing to surrender and subject to his discussing first with Nkomo and with his Executive." The apparent disagreement between Mugabe and Nkomo, according to Nyerere, was that Nkomo wanted to move forward quickly, and Mugabe wanted to consult first with the ZANU executive in Maputo. Nyerere explains that he did at first think the talks could work but warned Garba "that Smith was slippery: if Smith really was willing to hand over power they could not say 'no' but it was a big if." He was most worried, based on his answer, of the Frontline State presidents losing control over the negotiations. Nyerere had warned Garba that the Frontline State presidents "would not know what they were really advising the PF to get into and there were great dangers of misunderstandings and recriminations." At the Frontline State presidents' summit, Nyerere had heard accounts from Mark Chona and Nkomo of the secret meetings. Nyerere said he was convinced that "Smith had come out to get Nkomo." Nyerere suggested that Smith "wanted Nkomo because he

⁵⁹ From Ambassador Embassy Lagos to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Garba Lambasts Nyerere on Aborted Smith/PF Meeting," September 20, 1978, 1978LAGOS11686, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–1976, RG 59, General Records of the Department of state, USNA.

thought Nkomo could end the war. When Nkomo said he could not come without Mugabe, Smith had initially said that Mugabe was totally unacceptable.” Nyerere went on to relate what Garba and others had reported on the crux of the meeting, “that Smith ‘had asked Nkomo to persuade Mugabe to come out too, and he put up the proposition that he would deliver Chirau, Nkomo should deliver Mugabe and they could forget about Muzorewa and Sithole.’” Finally, Nyerere related that “Smith had not gone into detail about a handover of power. He had been willing to do so, but Nkomo had refused in the absence of Mugabe.”⁶⁰ High Commissioner Moon emphasized Nyerere’s insistence that the secret meeting had been a ploy by Smith to get Nkomo out of the PF. At the Frontline State presidents’ summit the day before, Nyerere said that “the unanimous conclusion of the Front Line leaders (and of Mugabe also) . . . had been that there was nothing to be had from secret talks with Smith.” Nyerere believed Smith needed Nkomo “to get the fighting stopped, Muzorewa and Sithole having failed to do this.” Nyerere emphasized that the Frontline State presidents were now unanimous that there would be no further talk and that “the war should go on.”⁶¹

Nyerere said he believed that the Nkomo/Smith talks had been dangerous because they had “caused some confusion within the PF.” Nyerere was also critical of Nkomo for not accepting the Frontline State presidents’ judgement during the summit. Nyerere added that should the Rhodesian government collapse, “and there was not one government and one army to replace his regime, there would be civil war (he confirmed specifically that he meant war between ZANU and ZAPU).” Nyerere said that he thought it would then “be impossible for any British Government to avoid intervening and to be drawn into taking sides. The only way to avoid this was through promoting the unity of the PF.” However, having said this, Nyerere went on to criticize Nkomo, saying that Nkomo “did not seem to understand that he could not himself end the fighting without Mugabe.” There is some inconsistency here in that Nyerere was assuming that Nkomo might think they could end the war without Mugabe, but such an argument would also require downplaying ZANLA’s role in the war. As the evidence shows, Nkomo never assumed ZIPRA could go it

⁶⁰ Dar es Salaam to FCO, “Rhodesia,” September 4, 1978, PREM 16/1834, BNA.

⁶¹ Ibid.

alone, without Mugabe and ZANLA, in terms of the transfer of power with Smith.

Nyerere commented that this attempt to “join Smith” had consequences: “If what he has done does not destroy him (Nkomo) politically, he (Nyerere) saw in it at least the beginning of the seeds of his destruction.” In response to the diplomats’ questions, Nyerere added that the Frontline State presidents’ decision not to continue talks with Smith “had been because of their own conviction that Smith’s approach was not genuine, and not because of reluctance on Mugabe’s part.”⁶² This again seems to only confirm the obvious, that Mugabe would not accept a secondary role to Nkomo in the PF, hence his refusal to attend a meeting with Smith, and Nyerere’s support of this decision.

John Graham was pessimistic about Nyerere’s reactions to the Nkomo/Smith talks. He wrote to the FCO that he felt “the great merit of the Nkomo scheme,” which he “had thought had been accepted by the Rhodesian Front, was that by achieving complete unity of the PF under Nkomo, the risk of a Mashona/Ndebele (or ZANLA/ZIPRA) war would be greatly reduced.” Graham believed that Nyerere, by siding with Mugabe and ZANU in not going forward with future talks, was moving in the wrong direction. “It is sad to see Nyerere, who has always proclaimed his desire to avoid a civil war of the kind that developed in Angola, lending himself to it.” Graham went on to criticize those who questioned “Nkomo’s ability to unite the Ndebele and the Mashona under his leadership.” Graham believed that Nkomo, “with ZAPU, remains the only African political leader who appears genuinely to attempt a national appeal.” Soured by Nyerere’s response, Graham now predicted a possible “Mugabe/Muzorewa alliance based on tribalism rather than political affinities, which will tend to increase the risk of a Mashona/Ndebele confrontation.”⁶³ Although Graham may not have been totally aware of Mugabe’s animosity toward Muzorewa, Graham was certainly prescient on the future of ZANU–ZAPU relations after independence.

⁶² Ibid. For Ambassador Spain’s account of Nyerere’s meeting, see Dar es Salaam to Secretary of State, “Rhodesia: Results of Lusaka Front Line Meeting,” September 4, 1978, DAR ES 03769, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–1976, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

⁶³ Graham to FCO, “MIPT: Rhodesia – Negotiated Settlement,” September 4, 1978, item 2, PREM 16/1834, BNA.

The Shooting Down of the Air Rhodesian Viscount Plane

Reaction to the “secret meetings” revelation and controversy in early September 1978 likely influenced the decision by ZAPU’s military wing, ZIPRA, to shoot down an Air Rhodesia Viscount passenger plane on September 3, 1978 using Soviet-made anti-aircraft missiles. The killing of Rhodesian civilians became international news, especially in Britain, and Nkomo was very tough in his rhetoric justifying the action based on the idea that the Rhodesian government was using civilian planes to transport troops. This act also served to show the Soviets and others that Nkomo was not in the “sell-out” mold painted by ZANU.

Another influence on the escalation of the war after the secret talks were exposed was the competition between Nkomo and Mugabe for Soviet and Cuban support. Mugabe and Nkomo had been in Ethiopia prior to the August 14 secret talks. Nkomo was there from August 6–8. Mugabe had also been there twice before, in May and June. There is an account of these visits to Addis Ababa from the US ambassador to Ethiopia, Frederick Chapin, that is copied in the FCO files. According to Chapin, “ZANU maintains a fulltime publicity and information officer in Addis Ababa, [named] ‘Comrade Stalin Mau Mau,’ which Nkomo’s organization, ZAPU, does not.” The report goes on to say that Mengistu treated Nkomo as a “Chief of State.” However, a local source in Addis Ababa told the British that Nkomo was increasingly uneasy about the treatment he received there compared to Mugabe. This unnamed source “characterized the ZANU–ZAPU alliance within the PF as an ‘unnatural marriage’ that cannot in the long run endure.” Interestingly, this source noted that it was Mugabe who had gotten himself closer to the Cubans and Soviets than Nkomo: “He went on to say that despite Mugabe’s basically African nationalist orientation he was close to being a prisoner of the Cubans and Soviets, something he said was not true of Nkomo.” The source also noted, that compared with the way Ethiopian leader Mengistu treated Mugabe, “Nkomo was said to be very unhappy at the results of his visit. Nkomo had apparently come to Addis Ababa hoping to get better treatment than that accorded Mugabe and did not get it.” The US ambassador to Ethiopia goes on:

Another reason for Nkomo’s visit at this time we are told was his concern over the military advantage which might accrue to Mugabe once the PF

soldiers, presently being trained by Cuban advisors in Ethiopia, return to their bases. The large majority of these PF trainees were said to be loyal to Mugabe. Apparently Nkomo did not get whatever he may have asked Mengistu to do in this respect.⁶⁴

According to British observers of the Addis Ababa international solidarity conference, Nkomo and Mugabe “were placed at the top table, but were the only two of the most distinguished guests not to speak. They sat side by side and neither spoke to nor looked at the other throughout the 4 hours of the ceremony.”⁶⁵

British accounts of the same event in Addis Ababa gives more details of what Nkomo had said there. Nkomo began by accusing Britain of “trying to bring about a puppet regime in Zimbabwe and Namibia to bolster the South African racist regime. The internal settlement had been set up with the connivance of Britain. An all party conference had not proved possible because ‘events of the past two months culminated in stepping up the armed struggle.’”⁶⁶ Nkomo then defended the Viscount incident, calling it “the most dramatic event of the armed struggle.” The report of his speech notes Nkomo’s rebuttal to the accusations that ZIPRA soldiers had killed survivors. “He said ‘we did not murder the survivors as they claimed, for we are not like Smith. Contrary to the lie of the Western press, all aboard the plane died when it was shot down and crashed.’” After justifying the shooting-down of the planes because they were thought to be carrying soldiers, “Nkomo described the outcry over 48 white victims, when hundreds of thousands of Africans were killed, jailed, humiliated and deprived of their basic human rights as ‘simple racist hypocrisy.’ He said, ‘We live in an era where racism is religion. This is the legacy of Britain.’”⁶⁷ To defend his position as a radical nationalist to the Ethiopian and pan-African audience, Nkomo put the blame squarely on the Western powers for their attempt at splitting the PF and declared his commitment to continued unity with Mugabe in the PF: “Nkomo was described as categorically rejecting the Western-orchestrated split

⁶⁴ American Embassy London Incoming Telegram, “Joshua Nkomo visits Addis Ababa,” August 10, 1978, item 394, FCO 36/2127, BNA.

⁶⁵ Addis Ababa to FCO, “International Solidarity Conference – Nkomo,” September 16, 1978, item 2, PREM 16/1835, BNA.

⁶⁶ From Addis Ababa to FCO, teln 343, “International Solidarity Conference – Nkomo,” September 16, 1978, PREM 16/1835, BNA.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

within the PF. He said, 'we agreed with Robert Mugabe that we in the PF will never split over the whole future of our people and our country.' Nkomo and Mugabe shook hands at the conference hall to a standing ovation."⁶⁸ Such a show of unity in Addis could not hide the vast differences between the two sides of the PF. The revelation of the Smith–Nkomo meeting was not enough, however, to break the fiction of unity from the perspective of the Frontline States, the Anglo-American diplomats, and most importantly Nkomo and Mugabe themselves.

In discussions following the revelation of the meeting and the condemnation by Nyerere and others, Owen met with the secretary of the Commonwealth, Sir Shridath Ramphal, who would play a major role in future negotiations leading up to, and during, the Lancaster House constitutional conference in 1979. Owen and Ramphal discussed the secret talks and subsequent problems for the PF and future negotiations with the internal settlement government. Owen admitted to Ramphal that he himself had been "involved in the Smith/Nkomo meetings" but he also said, "It was not our fault that Nyerere had not been told earlier what was going on." Mr Ramphal commented that it had been a mistake not to tell Nyerere earlier. Rather than claiming he had hoped to split the PF and have Nkomo reach a deal with Smith, Owen told Ramphal that "there was little doubt that Smith wanted to split the PF. The Nigerians had done well to give the PF cover at the talks with Nkomo. These had at least broken the log-jam." Here is a good example of Owen recalibrating his intentions. Owen told Ramphal that "it was a pity that no further meetings with the PF, including Mugabe, were planned for the moment. It was desirable that direct talks should take place again, including Mugabe; and that Mugabe should accept Nkomo as the leader of the PF."⁶⁹

By September 1978, the prospects of a negotiated end of the war and an Anglo-American proposal settlement were minimal. First, Ian Smith had announced plans for the internal settlement and Bishop Muzorewa's United African National Council had been part of this agreement. David Owen tried his best in a September 12 meeting with Muzorewa to convince Muzorewa to realize how precarious the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Meeting with David Owen and Shridath S Ramphal (Commonwealth SG), September 13, 1978, "Namibia/Rhodesia," PREM16/1835, BNA.

situation had become for him. Owen wrote of his meeting with Muzorewa: "I urged him to accept the realities of the situation, stressing that it was obvious that security was deteriorating fast and that there was a real risk of civil war. It was essential to involve the PF leaders in working out a settlement while there was still time for negotiation."⁷⁰ Muzorewa, for his part, suggested that the PF was welcome to return to Salisbury and were invited "to join the Salisbury interim administration." He also believed that the British and Americans would not be neutral when it came to appointing a resident commissioner "since it was clear that they were determined to impose Nkomo." He said that the British "would be happy to see the UANC eliminated." Owen claimed to have "firmly rebutted this," but made it clear that the British "did wish them to come together with the other nationalists (and the Front Line states) and be prepared to look again at some of the provisions of the Salisbury agreement." Muzorewa said he was prepared to meet with everyone, including "Nkomo and Mugabe, as well as Presidents Nyerere, Khama and Machel: in no circumstances however would he talk to President Kaunda."⁷¹

The fallout of the failed direct talks with Smith certainly hurt Nkomo's standing with the Americans. A memorandum to President Carter from the US secretary of defense, Harold Brown, in early October summarized the ways Nkomo's star status was dimming among southern Africa experts in the State Department. Summarizing reports from the State Department, Brown told Carter that Nkomo was increasingly less likely to join an all-party conference, "because he represents a minority ethnic group and is not confident that he could win a free election. He seems more confident of his military option, based on continued military support from the USSR and Cuba, and on the personal loyalty of President Kaunda in Zambia (ZAPU's safe haven)." Brown goes on to report that sources believe that "the other leaders, including Robert Mugabe of ZANU, all of whom represent the ethnic majority, apparently fear [redacted] Nkomo and probably are not anxious to share power with him." Brown suggests that Mugabe, given "his relatively weak political and military positions, might be willing to attend an APC [all-party conference] without Nkomo." He

⁷⁰ Owen to Salisbury, "Rhodesia: Bishop Muzorewa," September 14, 1978, item 2, PREM 16/1835, BNA.

⁷¹ Ibid.

also thought that it was therefore “possible that Mugabe’s chief supporters – Tanzania, Mozambique, and China – might endorse an APC without Nkomo because they are uncomfortable with the Soviet influence they see in ZAPU.” Such analysis is quite different from the overly confident position Mugabe and ZANU would publicly proclaim, but not without merit in 1978. Brown then proffered a “Mugabe Option” to President Carter: “If all of this is true, I think we should consider a ‘Mugabe Option’ of supporting an APC despite the possibility that Nkomo would not come.” Brown noted that there was a “disadvantage of a settlement without Nkomo,” as it would likely lead to Nkomo’s “continued pursuit of a military solution with Soviet/Cuban support.” But Brown felt that there would be “a good chance that the prospect of being left out plus the pressure from the front-line Presidents would then bring Nkomo to join an APC; if so, so much the better.”⁷²

Just over a month later, in November 1978, Thomas Thornton opined in his “Evening Report” for Brzezinski that the US embassy in London is suggesting that an all-party conference would be useful “perhaps as a way of moving things slightly off the track of increased violence that they are now on.” The US embassy was also of the opinion, “that Mugabe may be eclipsing Nkomo as the stronger leader of the PF.”⁷³ As the Americans were filling in the details to gain a better sense of the relative strengths of Mugabe and Nkomo in terms of their abilities to win an election in a post-Rhodesia formation, the British were also no longer working under illusions that the PF would be able to unite after the bad blood witnessed between the two parties since the formation of the PF in October 1976. Writing from Mozambique, the British ambassador, John Lewen, reported to the FCO a conversation he had with ZANLA leader Josiah Tongogara. The latter, who was

⁷² Memorandum for the President from Harold Brown, Secretary of Defense, October 7, 1978, “Nkomo, Mugabe, and the All-Parties conference (APC),” NLC-15-44-4-8-4, Carter Library See also David Martin, “More Doors open for Mugabe,” *Observer*, October 29, 1978, which links Mugabe to Soviets, as China cools off on ZANU.

⁷³ Thornton goes on to make an observation that is relevant for the next chapter: “Most significant they are very skeptical about the British will to reassert any authority in Rhodesia. While not excluding the possibility, they believe that the British would need iron-clad guarantees from everybody in sight that there would be no violence.” Thornton (North-South) writes to Brzezinski, November 20, 1978, “Evening Report,” NLC-24-54-4-4-6 “Rhodesia,” Carter Library.

held up previously as a leader willing to work with ZAPU and ZIPRA among the ZANU leadership, stated in no uncertain terms the disdain with which Nkomo was held at the end of 1978. Tongogara reportedly told Lewen that “in all earnestness,” if Britain were to “impose Nkomo as head of Government in Zimbabwe, ZANU would fight against him.” Lewin commented on this threat as follows: “This tends to confirm his reputation as an opponent of unity between ZANU and ZAPU.”⁷⁴ While this seems to counter the post-independence popular memory of Tongogara as a supporter of cooperation, and he would be more supportive of unity at Lancaster House in October 1979, it more likely refers directly to Tongogara’s insistence to the British that ZANU would not stand aside and accept any attempt by the British or the Nigerians to put Nkomo in a leadership position without guaranteeing Mugabe and Tongogara equal footing.

President Nyerere managed to keep his hold on the Frontline State presidents during the Nkomo–Smith talks and the push by Nigeria and Zambia to work without him. In a reflective mood, however, he had told the American chargé at the end of October, “I have always relied on Front Line State unity to get PF unity.” He confessed he “sometimes worries about the prospect of a military collapse of Smith’s forces because it would put ZANU and ZAPU armed forces in immediate confrontation.” Nyerere then reportedly said, “But as long as we have Front Line unity, we can deal with that. Now, however, I have a problem with Zambia – a genuine problem.” Nyerere related how he could no longer depend on Zambia, saying, “I think I am losing on FL unity.” If unity fails, Nyerere thought that “Smith will get more encouraged to be reckless, he will feel escalation will help him redefine the issue from that of liberation to other ones. – ‘All that nonsense about communists and big power interests.’”⁷⁵ High Commissioner Moon later reported that President Kaunda had left Dar es Salaam in a hurry, actually not wanting to stay the night. He apparently summoned his private plane from Lusaka, but when it didn’t arrive on time, he flew with the Angolan president, Agostinho Neto, in his helicopter.

⁷⁴ Lewen to FCO, “My Telno 386: Rhodesia-ZANU (Mugabe),” November 23, 1978, item 522, FCO 36/2128, BNA.

⁷⁵ Title states: “Following is (unpolished) draft of telegram which Walker US Chargé, is dispatching about his conversation with Nyerere.” Dar es Salaam to FCO and Washington, “My Telno 719: Rhodesia,” October 26, 1978, item 79, FCO36/2230, BNA.

Moon concluded that a lot of the disagreements among the Frontline State presidents had to do, supposedly, with Nyerere's failure "to appreciate sufficiently the full extent of the economic and political problems confronting President Kaunda."⁷⁶

Also at the end of 1978, Nkomo made another request for weapons from the Soviets, this time in large amounts. According to Soviet documents, Nkomo "requested the provision of weapons, ammunition, means of transport and communication, uniforms, food, equipment for the medical center and some other equipment in order to provide gratuitous material assistance to this party for 1979." The report notes that "J. Nkomo justifies his request by the need to intensify the armed liberation struggle in order to thwart imperialist maneuvers to resolve the Rhodesian problem on a neo-colonialist basis." Noting the close relationship between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and ZAPU since 1964, a request was forwarded to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for approval. This time, Nkomo could report on a much larger fighting force. "The nature of our revolutionary armed struggle dictates the need for a new for a new organizational structure of army on a battalion basis. These battalions are formed from 10,000 trained fighters, 4,000 people undergoing training and 17,000 recruits which will train over the next 12 months." The list of required equipment called for heavy weapons, including twenty "Strela" anti-aircraft installations, sixty-three 57 mm guns, one hundred and thirty-eight 82 mm mortars, 713 RPG hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers, fifty-four ZGU anti-aircraft installations, 2,700 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 2,800 Simonov SKS carbines, and 1,750 Makarov pistols. The ammunition and supply lists were extensive, including clothing "for 30,000 soldiers and recruits."⁷⁷ Nkomo and his generals were preparing for a conventional war against the Rhodesians, and knowledge of this certainly influenced all parties to work toward negotiations later in 1979.

⁷⁶ Dar es Salaam to FCO, "My Telno 736: Meeting of the Front Line State in Dar es Salaam," October 30, 1978, item 99, FCO36/2230, BNA.

⁷⁷ Document CT137/80: On the request of the leadership of the Zimbabwe Patriotic Front (ZAPU), December 12, 1978, Bukovsky Archives, <http://bukovsky-archives.net/pdfs/terr-wd/ct137b78.pdf>. Thanks to Ben Allison for locating and translating this document for me to use here.