

The Military and Politics in Zimbabwe, 1970s to 2018

Gilbert Tarugarira

Abstract

The dramatic role which the Zimbabwean military played in the “removal” of Robert Mugabe from power in November 2017 has caught the imagination of observers, commentators, and historians. The military involvement and intervention in politics has left a lasting imprint on the political trajectory of the Southern African region, particularly in Zimbabwe. This study steps back in history to locate sources of the Zimbabwean military’s mindset or the military mentality and particular conceptions of professionalism that nurtured its involvement in politics. The Zimbabwean military cannot be said to have had apolitical professionalism because attitudes of strict hierarchy, obedience, and loyalty to legally constituted authorities were not sufficient in themselves to block the military from intervening in politics. The securocrats held identical beliefs with politicians and so could also question the feasibility of the norm of strict aloofness from politics. The study established that the military orientation and related socialization of forces as well as attitudes promulgated during the armed struggle, largely shaped, the military and political leaders’ understanding of politics as well as ideas of how to wield power.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Military, Intervention, Politics, Socialization, Power