

# New book compares Mugabe to Pol Pot

BY HEIDI KINGSTONE

It is difficult not to be struck by the stark differences between Rhodesia at the beginning of Robert Mugabe's reign and the disaster that has befallen Zimbabwe today.

In 1980, after the war, Mugabe appeared on TV and said: "Let us deepen our sense of belonging and engender a common interest that knows no race, colour or creed."

The reality then, as now, was that the war brought wealth and power only to Mugabe's cronies. When, 25 years ago, Paul Moorcraft and Peter McLaughlin wrote *Chimurenga*, which has now been updated and revised as *The Rhodesian War: A Military History*, it was South Africa's apartheid system that dominated the news agenda.

A quarter of a century later Zimbabwe hurtles into chaos. "Rhodesia was killed off in a lost war, but Zimbabwe committed suicide," says Moorcraft.

The winds of change that were to blow through Africa and make it a more equitable place instead turned Zimbabwe into a hell hole for its inhabitants.

A former *Time* correspondent, Moorcraft covered the war from 1976-81, taught politics and history at the University of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, and is currently a visiting professor at Cardiff University, Wales. McLaughlin lived in Southern Rhodesia from 1956 to 1983 and served as a reservist before becoming principal of the British International School in Cairo.

In this bleak assessment the authors compare Mugabe's Zimbabwe to Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia, which killed about a million people. While Mugabe has not reached that level, he has driven millions from his country.

"Even the Khmer Rouge never managed to equal that. Much of the torture and murder has been hushed up in Zimbabwe," Moorcraft claims.

"When Mugabe goes and the horrors are revealed, the Pol Pot analogy will be even more validated. The 'black Hitler', is leaving his country in ruins and we should have seen it coming."

The decision to release the updated book was a result of the renewed interest in Zimbabwe. Mugabe's megalomania is now at the top of the international agenda. Although much photocopied and quoted, it had been out of print since 1982. The tragic lesson, as Moorcraft and McLaughlin write in the last paragraph, is that Zimbabwe will be "condemned to perpetual violence so long as Mugabe is in power, and the country will remain one big torture chamber. There can be no reconstruction until he goes. Legal retribution will have to wait."

"So, in one sense, Ian Smith was right," says Moorcraft from his home in Britain. "During the war, Smith claimed that Mugabe would destroy the Ndebele, and then drive the white farmers off the land, and wreck the country."

"This might sound non-PC but it is true: Rhodesia to Zimbabwe was the transfer of power from a racist white efficient elite to a racist black inefficient elite."

As the book charts the course of the war with the initial attack on Altena farm in the Centenary district, the involvement of Pretoria is never far from the main narrative.

The book traces the conflict's trajectory in painstaking military detail and assesses the lessons learned from the errors made by the Rhodesians and by the apartheid government of John Vorster.

"Rhodesian soldiers fought well and bravely, but it is axiomatic that even the best military can provide only 20 percent of the solution in counterinsurgency," argues Moorcraft.

"The Rhodesian politicians failed to provide the 80 percent - the political strategy - for their excellent forces. The insurgents lost nearly every battle, but won the war, despite frequent gross ineptitude and numerical superiority. But they had a simple political strategy - to break the back of white power."

South Africa's powerful army also needed a political strategy. Rather than fight on and Balkanise the country, the National Party, despite imploding after 1994, decided to bargain from a position of strength and to settle with Nelson Mandela.

The lesson to be drawn from Rhodesia is the law of unintended consequences. The war allowed the first electoral victory of a black Marxist. Likewise, for today's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the major unintended consequences have been the rise of Shia power in Iraq and the accelerated influence of Iran. A common lesson might be that the longer the war, the more radical the victorious opponent.

"Maybe Washington should copy Pretoria - strike a deal while they still can. Get out and claim victory," was perhaps a throwaway line by the controversial lead author of this new book.

The Rhodesian war is of current interest because of a need to reassess counterinsurgency strategies at a time when Iraq and Afghanistan shape Western futures.

"The US could still lose and leave. The difference with the Rhodesians was they felt that they did not have that option. They were fighting for their homes," says Moorcraft.

"Under Vorster, apartheid South Africa pulled the levers it had in Rhodesia, and forced Ian Smith to make concessions to his



An unidentified mother with her son and daughter wait for clients while selling cooking oil on the streets of Highfields in Harare this week. The cooking oil is repacked in smaller bottles and containers so people can afford them. Zimbabwe's inflation has soared to more than a million percent, according to independent analysts

PHOTOGRAPH: TSVANGIRAYI MUKWAZHI, AP

opponents. But Mbeki has never showed the same courage as Vorster. Mbeki has to defer to the great anti-colonial warrior Mugabe, because Mbeki sat out the anti-apartheid struggle as a student abroad.

"Also South Africa had a reputation for throwing its weight around during long wars of regional destabilisation in the 1970s and 1980s, so now tends to look for consensus in the region. Besides, the South African army is but a shadow of its former self."

Other unintended social consequences of the Rhodesian war were soaring divorce rates and a rise in alcoholism and illegitimacy rates for the white settler women, whose husbands went off for months at a time to fight in the bush.

Moorcraft and McLaughlin reveal that a sex scandal, hushed up until now, almost unravelled the delicate Commonwealth peacekeeping operation. The British commander, Major General John Acland, seduced another man's wife over a game of bridge.

That man was a senior army officer and a potential leader of a Rhodesian coup, according to British intelligence, and was dissuaded from shooting his love rival, and possibly destabilising the whole region.

Why Acland, now dead, would have risked all remains unanswered.

The book is full of intrigue, plots and plans. South African intelligence wanted

to assassinate Mugabe, but there might also have been plans afoot to kill off Britain's Prince Charles during his visit to Harare to represent the Queen during the independence celebrations in April 1980.

Peace in early 1980 was a very close-run affair, but the thousands of South African troops were forced to withdraw rapidly from Zimbabwe.

For years the South African military intelligence kept up the pressure on Mugabe with raids, backing Ndebele rebels and choking off vital rail supplies via the "notoriously drunken station-master at Messina".

It is ironic that today Pretoria will do so little to liberate Zimbabweans from their erstwhile liberator, Mugabe.

*The Rhodesian War* not only provides new details on the 1965-80 war, it also provides insights into how the South African military intervened long after Zimbabwean independence.

The book suggests there is historical evidence for how South Africa could resolve today's Zimbabwean crisis.

The tragedy is that, although the apartheid regime was prepared to sacrifice its white kith and kin in Rhodesia, the ANC will not risk undermining Mugabe in case the entire rationale for revolutionary leadership in the region collapses. Get rid of Mugabe, and you question the legitimacy of the ANC, as well as the sclerotic structures in Mozambique and Angola.