

The Rhodesian Bush War

(aka *2nd Chimurenga*)

1965 - 1979

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Background
Phases of War
Settlement
Aftermath
Comparison with Vietnam

Making connections



SGM 84080



Mr and Mrs Ewbank.

Escape couple wed

A COVENTRY couple who escaped death in an aircraft which was shot down by guerillas were married on Saturday.

Coventry Evening Standard
11th November 1979



"The Troopie"

Background: C18th and C19th

Prior to arrival of Europeans

The Shona tribes were the indigenous, subsistence agrarian inhabitants

Invaded by militant Ndebele from Natal in 1838

Shona became subservient, client population of Ndebele for 60yrs

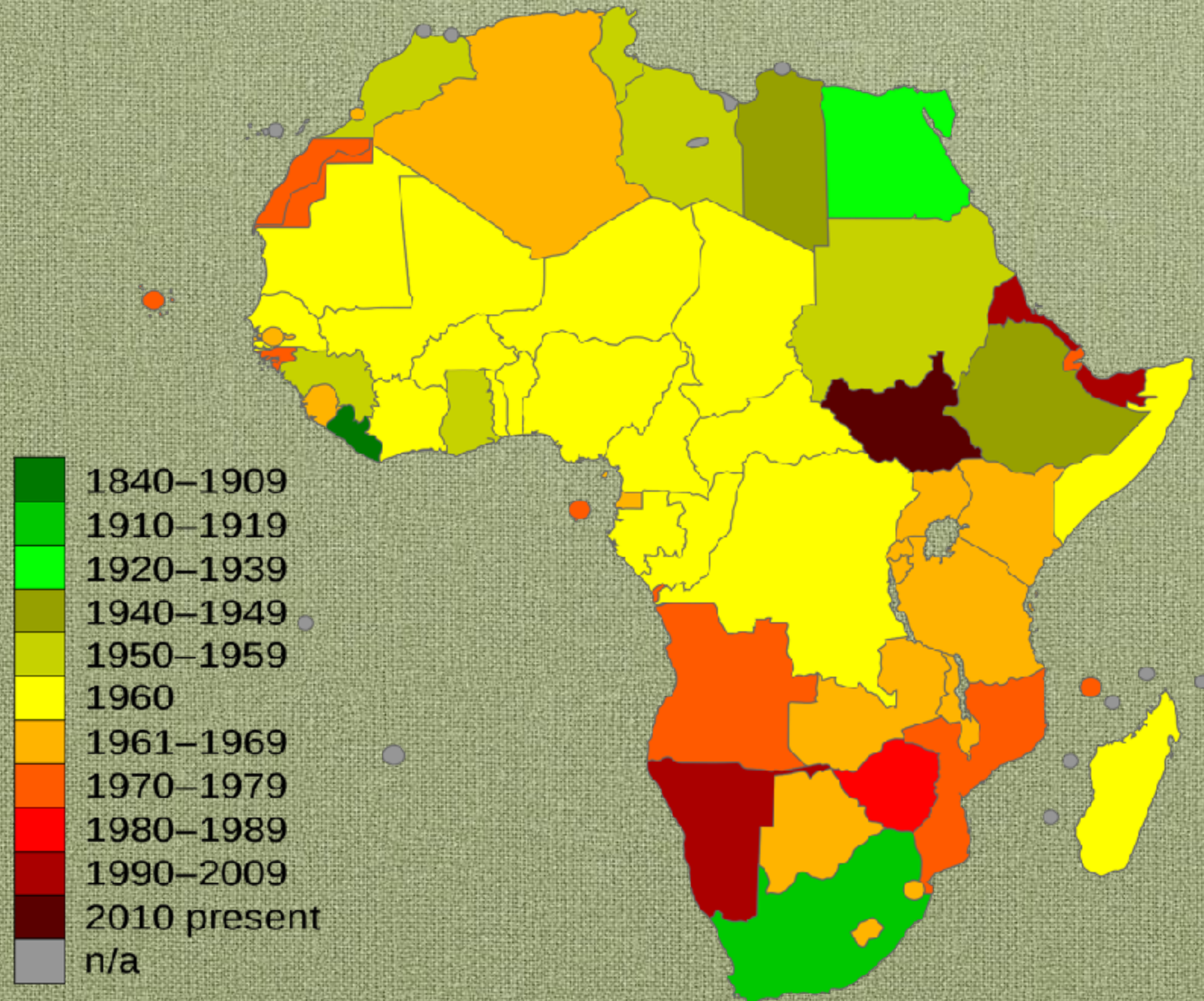
Arrival of Rhodes's colonists

Ndebele power broken in 1893

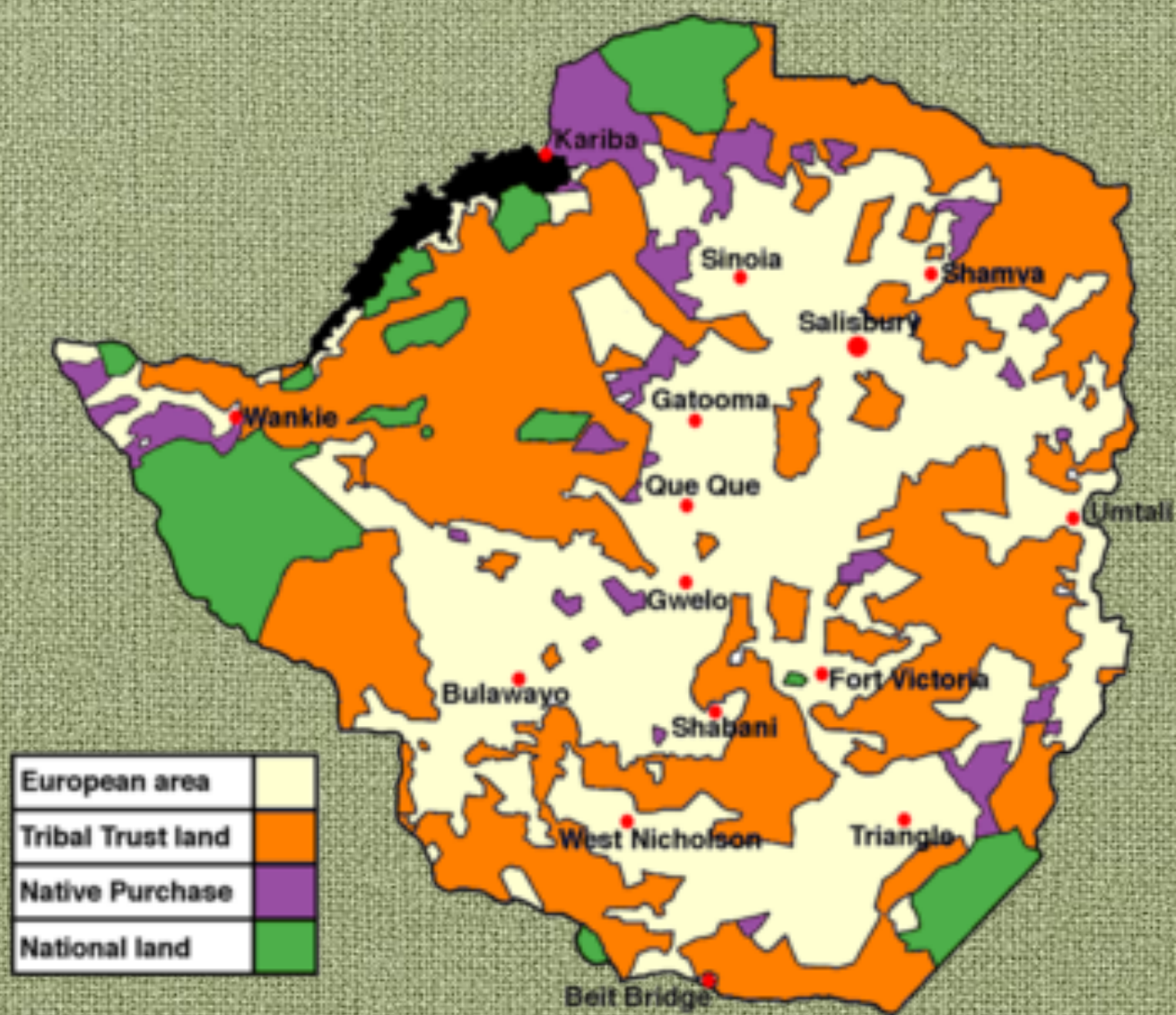
Colonists occupy the whole country

First *chimurenga* (uprising) in 1896-7

Background: African Geopolitical Context



“Wind of change” speech By Harold Macmillan
South Africa 1960



Local issues were land and
representation



The Protagonists & their Sponsors



Initial attempts to find a political accommodation ended in 1965 with UDI

	Nationalists	Rhodesians
Population	4.5 millions	250,000
Political	ZANU ZAPU	Rhodesian Front (government)
Military	ZANLA ZIPRA	Police Army Air Force
International Sponsors	China & Libya Soviet Union & Cuba Independent Africa	South Africa Portugal Isreal

The Nationalists and Their Tactics

	ZANU	ZAPU
Tribal base	Shona	Ndebele
Leader	Herbert Chitepo (-1975) Robert Mugabe (1975 -)	Joshua Nkomo
Bases	Mozambique Tanzania	Zambia Angola
Tactics	Insurgency	Insurgency Conventional
Strength (1979)	~ 25,000	~ 20,000

Poor co-ordination between ZPIRA & ZANLA

Neighbouring Countries' Allegiances

Rhodesians
covert supporters
South Africa
Mozambique



ZANLA support
from Frelimo in
Mozambique

Nationalist Weapons & Operational Areas & Tactics

Weapons

AK 47 Kalashnikov

Land mines (TM46)

SAM missiles

Grenade and rocket launchers

No wheeled vehicles
(until latter stages)

Tactics

Disrupt European way of life

Terror to spread fear & sap morale

Recruit cadres & populace



Rhodesian Weapons & Operational Areas & Tactics

Strength

19K regular Army & Police
34K reservists

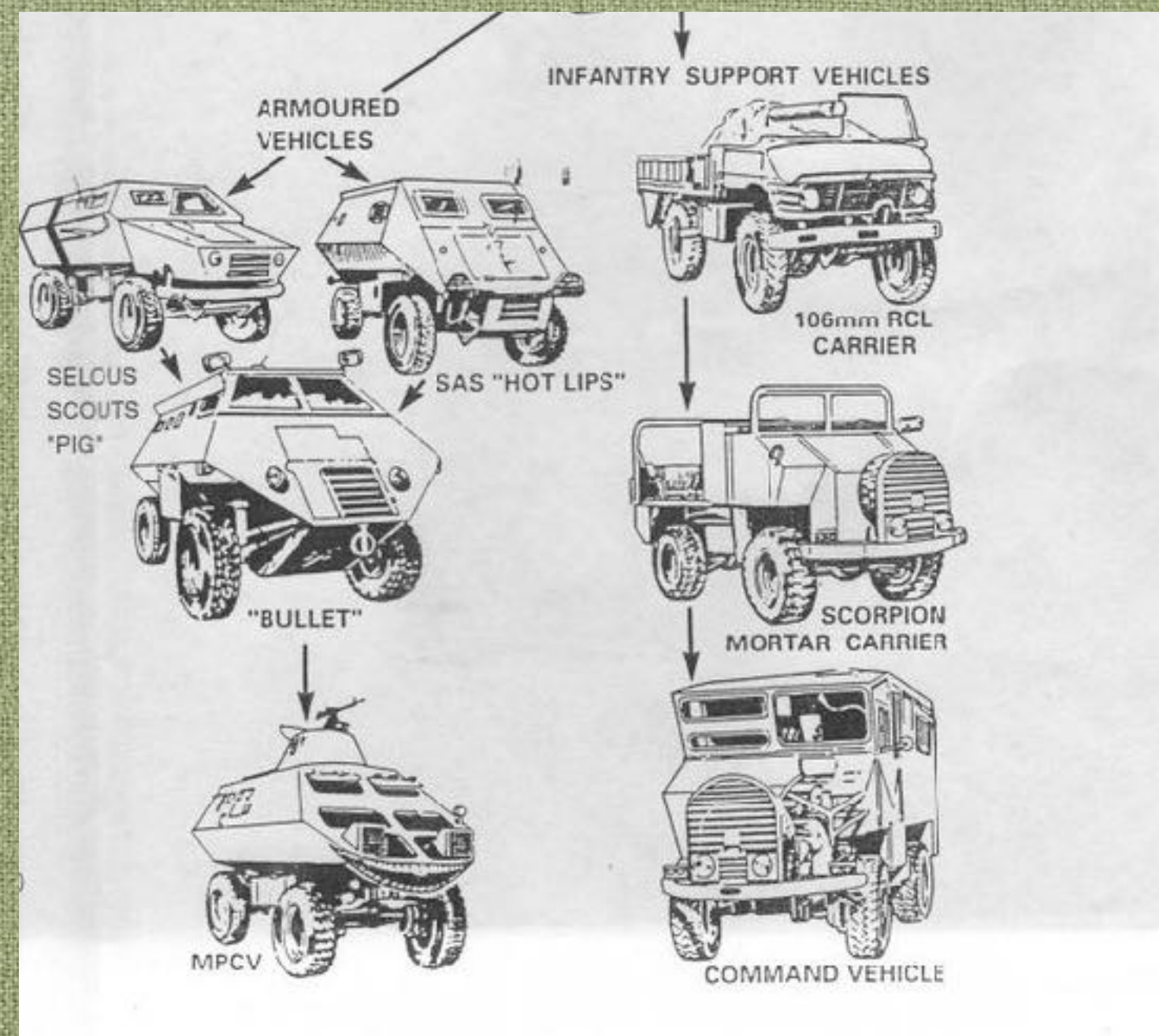
Weapons

FN & MAGs
Artillery
Aircraft & helicopters
Array of vehicles

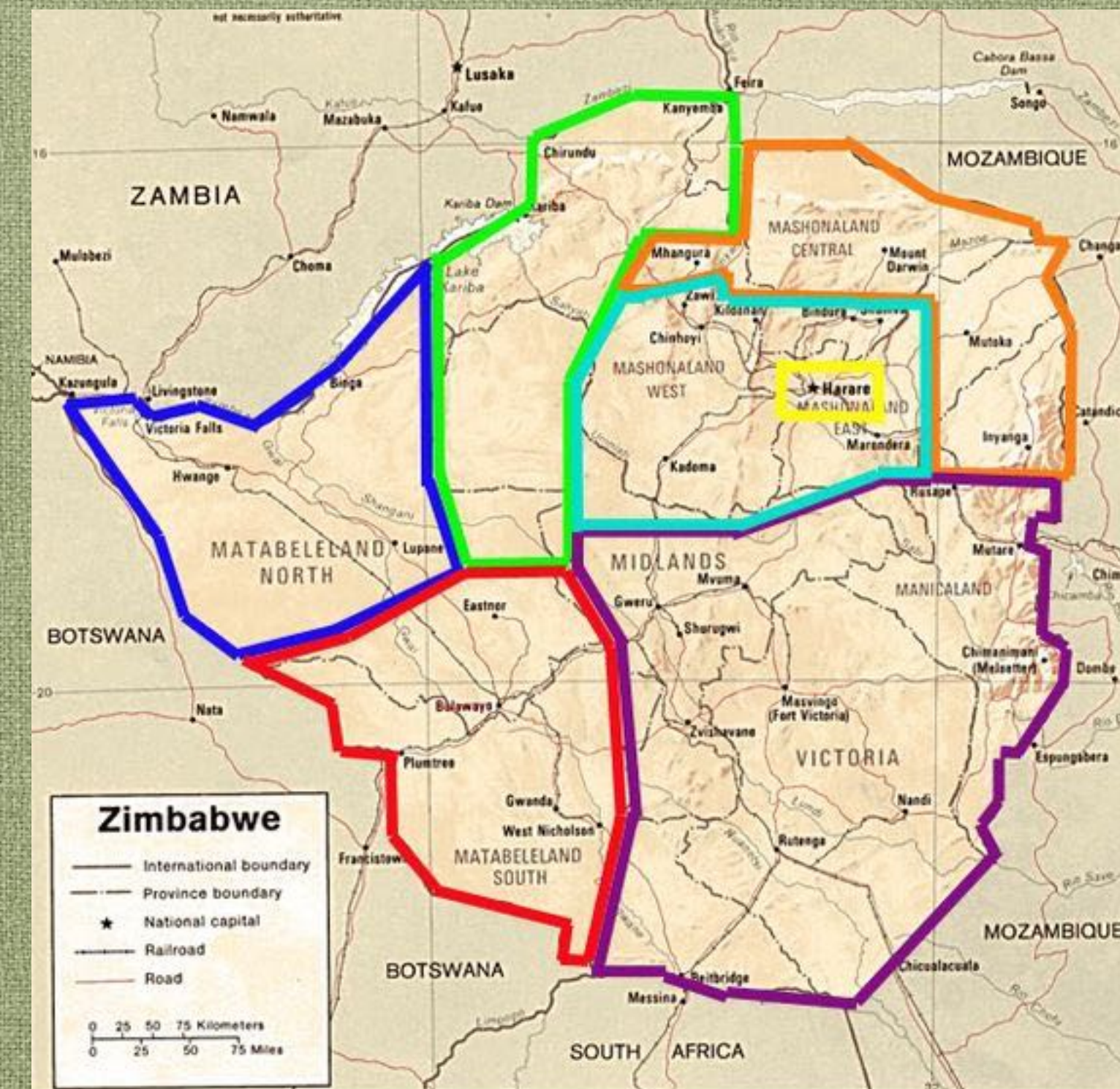


Tactics

Aggressive defence
Seek & destroy



Rhodesian Op Areas



Support from SA & Portuguese

Round One: 1965 - 1972

1966 First amateurish incursion across the Zambezi
14 guerrillas, aiming to attack farms and power lines
(in nationalist mythology became known as *The Battle of Sinoa*)

Other isolated rural incidents

Minor urban terror attacks, disrupted by effective informer network

While unsettling, regarded as police rather than military matter

Scale of nationalist resources and their resolve was underestimated

Round Two: 1972 - 1976

Gradual escalation

Escalation in numbers of incursions and size of groups
Increasing number of landmine and ambush casualties

Nationalists begin to win hearts & minds of locals

Carnation Revolution in Portugal had a major impact as opened whole Mozambique border

Establishment of protected villages

Cooling South African support

**Militarily the situation was contained,
but not improving**





Descent into all-out war *Going "external"*



1976 attacked Nyadzonya ZANLA/Frelimo base in Mozambique

1977 Operation Dingo attack on two ZANLA bases in Mozambique

1977 500 Rhodesian troops attack Mapai 100kms inside Mozambique

1978 bombed camps inside Mozambique in relation for attack on Umtali

October 1978 air attack on ZIPRA base nr Lusaka

1978 air raid on ZIPRA base in Angola (1,000kms)

September 1979 destroyed ZANLA base at New Chimoio (approx 3,000 dead)

Militarily effective but internationally condemned

Major incidents within Rhodesia

August 1977 bombing of Woolworths dept. store (11 dead & 50+ injured)

June 1978 23 people, inc women and children killed at Elim Mission, nr Umtali

3rd September 1978 Shooting down of civilian aircraft (8 of 52 passengers survived)

February 1979 Shooting down of civilian aircraft (59 deaths)



1979 Attack on strategic fuel reserves in Salisbury

Effect was more psychological than physical

Towards International Isolation

Several attempts to reach a political settlement failed (Geneva 1976)

The **nationalists** won the international propaganda war “hands down”
promise of hope & a better future for the locals

Claimed

humane treatment of a few released prisoners

Bombed camps in Zambia and Mozambique were refugee camps

By contrast the **Rhodesians** appeared

reactionary, colonial, racist

with only negative, defensive message about threat of communism

offering only token democracy

Of western press only The Daily Telegraph supported regime

Coming to a Settlement

By end of 1979, numerous factors make situation unsustainable:

- lose of support from South Africa
- obvious failure of the "internal settlement"
- serious economic slowdown caused by war
- civilian war weariness and flagging morale
- high levels of emigration
- scale of ongoing guerrilla incursions and their reserves

Lancaster House Agreement in November 1979

war ended in exchange for universal franchise elections

economic sanctions were lifted

Anxiety about the ceasefire & fears of a coup

ZANU-PF wins election convincingly in early 1980

The outcome was political not military

Aftermath



Following elections, majority rule was established
Promising, conciliatory start through 1980s
International "peace dividend"
Integration of Rhodesian and nationalist armies
Nkomo & others included in government

Ongoing conflict between ZANU & ZAPU lead to *gukurahundi* (or Matabeleland Massacres)
involvement of North Koreans as Fifth Brigade
1982 - 1985 as many as were killed as in the whole war

Mugabe consolidates power of ZANU-PF
Remained President until 2019 (37 years)

For the majority the promise of a better life remains unfulfilled

Final assessment of the military action

“Their army cannot be defeated in the field by terrorists, or even a much more sophisticated enemythe Rhodesians now have the most professional and battle worthy army in the world at this particular type of warfare”

General Sir Walter Walker
The Times, January 1978



**... but ultimately failed to prevent their most feared outcome
a Marxist government !**

The Human Cost

As in all colonial wars, indigenous lives are less carefully counted

	Nationalists/locals	Rhodesians
Combatants	20,000	1,120
Civilians	7,800 *	468
Mozambique and Zambia	5,000	handful

* not including judicial killings

Comparison with Vietnam War

	Nationalists <i>vis a vis</i> Vietcong	Rhodesians <i>vis a vis</i> Americans
Similarities	<p>Regarded Rhodesia as home</p> <p>Relied on support of local population</p> <p>Promised a better future</p> <p>Military tactics</p>	<p>Under-estimated their enemy</p> <p>Relied on hardware and firepower</p> <p>Use of military PR data</p> <p>Strategy was defensive</p> <p>Eventually overwhelmed by scale</p>
Differences	<p>No spectacular initiatives (eg Tete Offensive)</p> <p>Less success infiltrating urban population</p>	<p>Rhodesia is home (3rd gen)</p> <p>Controlled local radio & TV</p> <p>No civilian anti-war protest</p> <p>Dependent on SA support to sustain war effort</p>

Monuments to the Conflict



Heroes' Acre
Harare, Zimbabwe



RAR memorial,
National arboretum,
Staffs, UK



The Troopie
Hatfield House, Herts, UK