



COMMUN IX
HISTORICAL CRISIS COMMITTEE

THE ZIMBABWEAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Background Guide

Authored by Jaewon '27
Edited by Henry '24

INTRODUCTORY LETTERS

Letter from the Crisis Head

Dear Delegates,

It is with great appreciation that I welcome you to the Zimbabwean War of Independence Historical Crisis Committee at the ninth annual Commonwealth Model United Nations Conference. Through your speeches, position papers, and resolutions, you will be free to mold the future of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, either through negotiations for peace, or the continuation of war.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now look back on the Zimbabwean War of Independence and see how historical actions led to the present day geopolitical situation. In this committee, you will have the opportunity to go back in time, change the course of the war, and, thus, reshape the modern world through your choices.

Please be aware that as you research this topic, you may be exposed to some of the atrocities committed during this war and related conflicts. I believe that learning about all aspects of the situation is essential to truly understanding it and that these events can serve as warnings and guides for our own choices, both in this committee and in modern conflicts. That being said, if you have any concerns about the material, please be sure to let me or the chairs know.

Delegates, approach and research this topic with an open mind. Be prepared to change your assumptions and beliefs, champion beliefs you do not share, and debate and resolve disputes between many differing viewpoints. Only then will you be able to fully experience what this committee has to offer.

If you have any questions about any part of this background guide, external research, your position paper, or anything else related to this committee, please feel free to contact me or any of the chairs via email. Best of luck to every single one of you.

Best Regards,
Jaewon Choi '27
Crisis Head,
The Zimbabwean War of Independence
jaewon@commschool.org

Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

The chairs and crisis staff welcome you to the Zimbabwean War of Independence: Historical Crisis Committee. As mentioned above by the Crisis Head, this is a complex committee, which will require high levels of research and cooperation among the delegates. We believe you are all more than capable of rising to the occasion. Some of the topics addressed in this committee are extremely complex and sensitive, including racial conflicts,

imperialism, and colonialism. We believe in you to approach these topics with great care and tact, respecting the committee and your fellow delegates.

Finally, **this committee requires that delegates submit a position paper** in order to be eligible for awards. Position papers are an amazing opportunity to learn more about the person you will be representing, organize your research, and practice your writing skills. We've found that delegates who complete position papers are better prepared and can speak more knowledgeably during the conference, and, so, are able to have a more meaningful COMMUN experience. If you have questions about this process or would like to see an example position paper, we encourage you to look at the [FAQ](#) and [Resources](#) pages on our website. Of course, you're also welcome to contact either us or the Crisis Head with any questions or concerns you may have.

The committee may be set during a historical event but the power to change the future of this conflict will rest solely with you. We wish you great success and a fruitful committee session.

Sincerely,

Dava Sitkoff '24
Chair,
The Zimbabwean War of Independence

Eve Shapiro '24
Co-Chair,
The Zimbabwean War of Independence

COMMITTEE INFORMATION

Since this committee is a historical crisis committee, it is not considered part of or administered by the United Nations. Instead, it is an independent forum for discussions and negotiations between the Rhodesian government and independence groups, with additional third party representatives. Beyond the powers typically given to delegates in a General Assembly, delegates in this committee will have portfolio powers, which they may use to directly affect the conflict. They will receive regular updates about the war, global reception, and other relevant news from the crisis head, and will need to respond accordingly.

The start date of this committee is January 1, 1978, with all prior historical events considered canon. After the first, delegates will be in control of the timeline, with the power to change history. This means that delegates should not refer to real historical events that occurred after January 1, 1978 (e.g. the Internal Settlement, the Lancaster House Agreement, etc.) in committee, though they should certainly learn about them while researching.

Finally two short notes on naming conventions that will appear throughout this guide and in committee:

1. While researching the conflict this committee addresses, you may see it called the Rhodesian Bush War, the Zimbabwean War of Liberation, or a slew of other names. Here, it is referred to as the Zimbabwean War of Independence, as we believe this is the most neutral and accurate name for the conflict.

2. The words Rhodesia and Zimbabwe will both be used to describe the territory being fought over in this conflict. Rhodesia is the existing state's name, while Zimbabwe is a possible name for a hypothetical state in Rhodesia's current territory, governed by majority rule. Delegates may choose to refer to the area as either Zimbabwe or Rhodesia, depending on their role's stance, and any official name changes will be decided upon in committee.

COMMITTEE GOALS

The goal of this committee is to address not only the war itself, but the conditions that led to its outbreak.

The committee stands to address the leading cause of this conflict, the political imbalance in which the people of color receive minimal representation in government. In contrast, most influential positions in civil, military, and government are occupied by White population.

Therefore, such racial imbalance, along with the fact that Rhodesia did not accept the internationalized trend to give more political control to the native population rather than the colonials through the downfall of empires, led to local natives creating paramilitary groups to liberate the lands of Rhodesia and bring power into the hands of natives. With this, this committee's primary focus is deciding between a pacifist approach of a more inclusive government with Rhodesia continuing to exist or a case in which Rhodesia itself as a country falls, and a new country is made by the independence division, with the Whites' political ground remaining. Otherwise, the territories will fall under another bloodbath of conflict and agony as the continuation of war rises as the only option.

Neither option is ideal for either party. Therefore, the delegates must deliberate and negotiate on the Rhodesian Cabinet's need to retain some form of control as colonists, but also the Independence Group's need to establish an inclusive and democratic government.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Figure 1. Rhodesia and southeast Africa, 1978.

Orange: Supports independence groups.

Purple: Supports Rhodesian government.

Source: Wikimedia

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RHODESIA

In 1888, Cecil Rhodes formed De Beers Consolidated Mines, the result of years of consolidation and buyouts of diamond mines in southern Africa and significant investment from European bankers. Rhodes's company gained a near total monopoly on the global diamond trade, and grew immensely wealthy as a result. Soon after, Rhodes formed the British South Africa Company (BSAC), which received a charter from Britain to control territory north of South Africa. Using the wealth from De Beers, Rhodes financed colonial expansion, with BSAC controlling almost every aspect of these newly acquired territories.

During this time, Rhodes also entered British politics, eventually becoming the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony (modern day South Africa). Rhodes's political and business ventures were both inspired by his colonial ideology: He believed that native Africans were uncivilized, and that it was Britain's duty—nay, destiny—to colonize Africa, control the land, and better the lives of the native populations and the settlers.

Following this philosophy, Rhodes acquired new land for the British Empire, using mineral concessions from indigenous chiefs to incorporate their land into BSAC-controlled territory. He used the BSAC to rule, police, and expand this massive area, which included the territory now known as Rhodesia, marking the start of decades of European rule over it and its people.

In 1895, BSAC named the territories it controlled “Rhodesia,” after Rhodes, and divided these territories into Southern, Northeastern and Northwestern Rhodesia.¹ Rhodes would die soon after in 1902, but his death by no means meant the end of British and European colonial ambitions in Africa. It would not be until decades later, in the aftermath of World War II, that European powers would begin to withdraw from their colonial holdings in Africa.

In the decades after World War II, the British government slowly withdrew from many of its colonies including Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Burma, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda. The governments of these newly formed countries, for the first time in decades or even centuries, were now ruled by their native populations. Many White settlers feared that a similar decolonization effort in Rhodesia would give control of the government to the Black majority population, which numbered around twenty times the size of Rhodesia's White population, but which received just a small fraction of positions in the government.

In 1962, the Rhodesian Front, a far-right party, which opposed majority rule and sought to maintain White control of Rhodesia, won a majority in the Rhodesian parliament. Under Labour Party Prime Minister Harold Wilson, the United Kingdom refused to grant Rhodesia independence without a transition to a Black majority controlled government. Refusing this demand, Rhodesian Front leader and Prime Minister of Rhodesia Ian Smith, along with his cabinet, wrote the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), putting it into effect on November 11, 1965. Following the South African model of sovereign White rule in Africa, Smith believed the UDI would maintain the power of the White minority

¹ The territory referred to in this guide as “Rhodesia” is the successor to Southern Rhodesia. The northern Rhodesian territories eventually merged and, in 1964, became the Republic of Zambia.

population in Rhodesia over the government and economy of Rhodesia. Of course, this plan was opposed by the Black population in Rhodesia and the political parties that had formed in Rhodesia to support Black majority rule.

In 1957, Joshua Nkomo had founded the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC) as a nonviolent resistance group that campaigned for universal suffrage and equality in Rhodesia. After the Rhodesian government banned SRANC in 1959, detained many of its leaders, and outlawed even small gatherings of Black people that opposed the Rhodesian government, Nkomo founded the National Democratic Party (NDP) as SRANC's successor. Just days after the NDP was banned in 1961, Nkomo founded the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), which was outlawed in 1962, but which continued to operate illegally and outside of the country. In 1963, many prominent members of ZAPU, frustrated by Nkomo's leadership and disagreeing with him over ideology (see "Zimbabwean Independence Groups" in "Bloc Positions" below), splintered from ZAPU to form the alternative Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party. ZANU was similarly outlawed by the Smith administration. The Rhodesian government's efforts to silence Black dissent were, thus, unsuccessful. Instead, the Rhodesian government's repressive laws and tactics pushed Black Rhodesians away from complicity and compromise, turning political disagreement into military conflict.

Such actions by the Rhodesian government led many Black people to support independence groups or even join their paramilitary wings, magnifying the size of the insurgencies and the scale of the conflict.

CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

As noted above, a direct cause of the Zimbabwean War of Independence was the outlawing of independence parties in Rhodesia, pushing them towards violence. Many pro-majority rule parties, such as ZANU and ZAPU, began creating large paramilitary wings, since it was one of the only forms of direct action available against the Rhodesian government. Such paramilitary wings received significant amounts of support from across the world, since many nations were opposed to Rhodesia's sudden declaration of independence from the United Kingdom and its racist policies.

These racist policies were another major cause of the conflict. Beyond the native Black population's extremely limited political rights, indigenous Africans also suffered significant economic and social discrimination in Rhodesia. Many socially powerful roles and corporate positions in major companies were restricted to White individuals, and the vast majority of the nation's wealth belonged to the White minority. The White-controlled government has consistently failed to assist the Black population, leading to low quality of life and poverty in many regions.

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Zimbabwean War of Independence was primarily fought in small skirmishes in rural areas between ZANU or ZAPU paramilitary forces and Rhodesian security forces. Urban centers, including Rhodesia's capital, Salisbury, were not

significantly affected, nor were the day-to-day operations of the nation. During this time, Rhodesian forces dealt heavy blows to independence fighters and innocent civilians. The attitude of Rhodesia's government, echoed through Ian Smith's later statement was that "the more [they] killed, the happier [they] were." ZANU and ZAPU's small incursions, however, required disproportionate resources from the Rhodesian Defence Forces to repel and prevent, and eroded rural White Rhodesians' trust in the government, unsure it could keep them safe.

After 1972, ZANU and ZAPU forces increased the size and scale of their attacks in Rhodesia. With training and aid from foreign communist governments, the groups captured numerous White-owned farms across the rural regions of Rhodesia. Though still significantly outgunned and outrained by Rhodesia's defense forces—widely considered one of the most elite armies in the world—ZANU and ZAPU had more manpower than Rhodesia's forces.

This campaign by ZANU and ZAPU captured significant portions of Rhodesia from the government throughout the mid-1970s. By 1976, the Mozambique and Zambia borders had been closed, isolating Rhodesia economically but failing to prevent incursions by the independence militias.

By this point, most nations had already declared opposition to the Rhodesian government. The UN had required sanctions on Rhodesia since 1965, though several nations, including South Africa and Portugal (and its colony Mozambique) refused to enforce them. When Mozambique gained independence in 1975, Rhodesia could no longer rely on it as an ally, cutting off a key source of support and its access to the sea. Many superpowers, including the US, UK, USSR, and PRC pressured Rhodesia to negotiate a ceasefire. Even South Africa, a country that strongly supported White-led governments and Rhodesia's most important ally, believed Rhodesia incapable of winning the conflict and declared its support for a peaceful compromise between the two opposing sides. With South Africa pushing for compromise, Rhodesia no longer has any international allies supporting the conflict.

At the present date, the Rhodesian government understands the precarious state of the country but many government officials are not ready to give up on the war. Current Foreign Affairs Minister P.K. Van Der Byl, for example, commented in 1977 that, "it is better to fight to the last man and the last cartridge and die with some honor" than to capitulate to the independence forces. Meanwhile, the independence forces have lost thousands of men and are fighting a significantly more powerful force, requiring huge sacrifices for small gains. Today, both sides come to the negotiating table, neither satisfied with or capable of sustaining the status quo for much longer.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Will Rhodesia continue to exist as a state? If so, how will the committee ensure that Rhodesia receives international recognition as a legitimate state?
- What strategies can be implemented to balance the interests of the White minority and the black majority, ensuring a peaceful coexistence in Rhodesia's future governance?
- Will the solutions negotiate a permanent end to the war, a ceasefire, or a continuation of the war?
- How can the committee ensure equal levels of political participation for all Rhodesians?

- Will there be constitutional amendments to the Rhodesian Constitution, or will there be any organization/institution to ensure the lasting equality of elections and political participation in Rhodesia?
- How will the committee address past instances of violence and war crimes perpetrated by both sides of this conflict?
- In what way(s) will the damages caused by the war to both civil and public property be compensated for and rebuilt?
- How can this committee reduce and eliminate future racial tensions and hostilities?
- How can the committee facilitate the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons affected by the war?
- How will the committee approach land redistribution in a way that rectifies past injustices without inciting further conflict?

BLOC POSITIONS

Rhodesian Government

The primary goal of the Ian Smith Cabinet in the early 1960s was to establish permanent, long-term governance of Rhodesia by the White minority, which led to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. In the declaration, Rhodesia took the unprecedented step of declaring independence from Great Britain, while itself still being a colonial government in Africa. This declaration reflected the stance of the Ian Smith Cabinet on native control and colonialism, since the primary purpose of the UDI was to maintain power and not be forced by the British government to yield control of Rhodesia to the natives and move towards a native-led independence scheme. The declaration ran contrary to the international policy of ending colonialist and imperialist ventures, and Rhodesia's independence has not been formally recognized by the United Nations or any other nation.

In accordance with the policy of everlasting minority rule, the Rhodesian government has reacted strongly to guerilla attacks by the paramilitary wings of ZANU and ZAPU, classifying the organizations as terrorist groups and launching aggressive military campaigns to eliminate them.

However, the White population in Rhodesia being a significant minority meant that the Rhodesian Defence Force did not have sufficient available manpower as the conflict increased in its depth and severity. This rendered the Rhodesian Defence Force unable to supplement its military capabilities when they suffered heavy losses against ZANU and ZAPU. Unlikely to win in a drawn-out conflict, Ian Smith's Cabinet, therefore, has been forced to moderate some of their positions and accept the possibility of native political participation.

This has led to the current stance of the Rhodesian government, where the cabinet is open to discussions on establishing greater fairness in elections and diversifying the composition of its parliament by legalizing ZANU and ZAPU as legitimate political parties. Significant electoral reforms, however, would mean that the White minority population would lose much of its power in the general elections, likely causing Ian Smith's and his cabinet's party, the Rhodesian Front, to lose control of the government.

The Rhodesian government is entering these negotiations aware of its military weaknesses, while attempting to negotiate a deal that maintains as much White settler control of Rhodesia's government and land as possible.

Zimbabwean Independence Groups

Zimbabwe's independence groups all aim to establish majority rule in Rhodesia and achieve complete liberation from White minority rule. Their plans and tactics to achieve this goal, however, differ significantly from group to group and even within specific organizations. Though superficially similar—in name and aims—it is essential to understand the differences between the two main independence parties in the war, ZANU and ZAPU, and their respective paramilitary wings ZANLA and ZIPRA. Their similarities and differences are summarized below:

ZANU:

The People's Republic of China is the chief backer of ZANU, supplying it with training and arms. ZANU's ideology, likewise, is most closely aligned with the Chinese government's Maoist beliefs.

ZAPU:

ZAPU is instead backed by the USSR, and subscribes more closely to its Marxist ideology.

State backers and ideologies:

Both Marxism and Maoism seek to achieve a classless communist society, but Marxism focuses on mobilizing urban workers (the proletariat), while Maoism mainly recruits from poor rural farmers. As such, ZANU is considered more rural, ZAPU more urban.

Regions of activity and ethnic support:

ZANU draws the majority of its fighters and support from the Shona people, who make up around 70% of the black population in Rhodesia. ZANU fights mainly in eastern Rhodesia, where the Shona are more numerous, with foreign bases in Mozambique and Zambia (see map above).

ZAPU operates in the west of the country, with its support coming from the minority Ndebele and Kalanga ethnic groups. Its foreign bases are located primarily in Botswana and Zambia (see map above).

ZANLA and ZIPRA each have similar troop numbers, with approximately 25,000 and 20,000 forces, respectively.

The support of Rhodesia's majority Black population, along with recent victories over Rhodesian forces using guerrilla tactics, have brought victory quite near to the independence groups. Throughout the conflict, however, ZANU and ZAPU's troops have experienced

heavy exhaustion and casualties, and some members of the parties have begun to question their militaristic stances. In 1976, for example, ZANU and ZAPU joined under a shared Patriotic Front (PF), fighting together against Rhodesian forces. A small faction of ZANU, led by Ndabaningi Sithole, was uninterested in continuing the war through the PF, and split from the rest of ZANU to instead negotiate directly with the Rhodesian government. ZANU is thus technically two separate parties: ZANU–PF and ZANU–Ndonga, founded by Sithole.

With momentum firmly on their side, continuing the armed conflict may seem pragmatic for the independence groups. But ZANLA and ZIPRA forces, which have received almost no proper training, are up against one of the best trained and effective militaries in the world. Rhodesian troops have completely fortified the capital of Salisbury and many strongholds throughout the country. Continuing the conflict will likely result in thousands of additional casualties and further fractures in the independence groups.

Mozambique

Ever since 1975, when Mozambique received independence from colonial Portugal, its stance has remained resolute: It fully supports independence fighters in their struggle against Rhodesia. It is one of leaders of the international geopolitical effort to isolate Rhodesia diplomatically and economically from the outside world. Mozambique has provided sanctuary for independence fighters (especially for ZANU), along with military training and logistical support.

Mozambique's government's main objective at this conference is to give additional pressure to the Rhodesian government to agree to the demands of the independence leaders. They may also wish to supply ZANU—possibly ZAPU—forces, in order to reduce exhaustion and try to compensate for the losses suffered over years of guerilla warfare.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, like Mozambique, is firmly opposed to Rhodesia as an independent state. As stated, Rhodesia was once a colony of the United Kingdom, but declared independence unilaterally, against the will of the UK. Therefore, the United Kingdom excluded the newly independent Rhodesia from the Commonwealth of Nations, and led the United Nations to sanction Rhodesia.

The UK government's opposition to Rhodesia is further bolstered by the left-wing Labor Party government, which has supported the independence of its former colonies only under majority rule. The UK is not directly supporting Communist ZANU and ZAPU, but is certainly willing to facilitate negotiations and any deals reached that transition Rhodesia to majority rule. A major fear for the UK, in the midst of the Cold War, is the undue influence China and the USSR may have on Rhodesia, given their funding of ZANU and ZAPU.

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union—in a rare moment of consensus with the West—opposes Rhodesia, in line with its anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist foreign policy. Additionally, the USSR

views revolutionary anti-imperialist movements as opportunities to create Communist and USSR-aligned states around the world, as part of the broader Cold War. Mozambique, Angola, and the Republic of the Congo all now have close ties to the USSR after revolutionary regime change. By providing funding to ZAPU, the USSR may be hoping for a similar outcome in Rhodesia.

China

The People's Republic of China, like the USSR, has provided military aid to independence fighters in Rhodesia, as its foreign policy—like the Soviet's—opposes imperial and colonial ventures. While both communist superpowers support independence for Zimbabwe, conflicts still exist between China and the USSR around how to establish independence and how an independent Zimbabwe will align itself on the world stage. While the USSR supports ZAPU, for example, China instead funds and backs ZANU. China sees these negotiations as an opportunity to maximize its influence in Rhodesia and gain an ally in the region.

South Africa

The South African government firmly supports Rhodesia's. Both governments enforce White minority rule against a Black majority population in Africa—South Africa infamously through the apartheid system. While South Africa, along with every other nation, does not officially recognize Rhodesia's sovereignty, they have disregarded UN sanctions against Rhodesia, and actively trade with and assist the Rhodesian government.

Though opposing much of the world may be a tall task, South Africa fears that without significant assistance, the Rhodesian government will collapse, which, in turn, may lead to instability and collapse within its own borders. Therefore, South Africa's chief goal is preserving as much White control, influence, and privilege in Rhodesia as possible.

ROLES AND PORTFOLIO POWERS

In addition to the following very brief overview of the status and portfolio powers available to each role, delegates are expected to research their respective roles in more detail. This should include both understanding their positions on the issues before the committee (see "Bloc Positions" above) and the actions they could take through private directives (their portfolio powers). If a delegate has any questions about whether specific portfolio powers are available to them, they should feel free to reach out to the chairs for clarification, or ask during the committee session via a note to the chairs.

Rhodesian Government

Cabinet Members:

- Prime Minister - **Ian Smith**

As the head of Rhodesia's current government, Smith has all the power typically accorded to a prime minister in a parliamentary system: control over Rhodesia's executive branch and policies.

- Minister of Agriculture – **Mark Partridge**

White farmers make up a core demographic group in Rhodesia, and agriculture a core sector of the economy. Partridge has power over internal agricultural policies, limited control of White farmers, and influence over international trade.

- Minister of Commerce and Industry – **Desmond Lardner-Burke**

A prominent White supremacist, Lardner-Burke controls the growing Rhodesian industrial sector, including domestic arms production. He also has significant influence over foreign trade.

- Minister of Defence – **Roger Hawkins**

Head of Rhodesia's elite military and security forces. Powers to train, mobilize, and utilize forces.

- Minister of Foreign Affairs – **P. K. van der Byl**

Since Rhodesia is not formally recognized by any foreign nation, van der Byl's role is to work with supportive nations, such as South Africa, and work towards future formal international recognition. Van der Byl has the power to meet with representatives from nations not represented in this committee.

- President – **John Wrathall**

Though mostly a ceremonial role, the President is the official head of state of Rhodesia, and can shape opinion in Rhodesia's parliament and populace.

Zimbabwean Independence Groups

ZANU Members:

- Leader and First Secretary – **Robert Mugabe**

Mugabe leads ZANU operations, including political negotiations, recruitment, and foreign affairs.

- Commander of ZANLA – **Josiah Tongogara**

Controls ZANLA's forces (see "Hawkins" above for portfolio powers).

- Founder of ZANU–Ndonga – **Ndabaningi Sithole**

Controls the more moderate ZANU–Ndonga, which has negotiated directly with the Rhodesian government, and has a fair amount of popular Black support.

ZAPU Members:

- Founder and Leader – **Joshua Nkomo**

Leads ZAPU (see "Mugabe" above for portfolio power).

- Commander of ZIPRA – **Lookout Masuku**

Controls ZIPRA's forces (see "Hawkins" above for portfolio powers).

Third Parties

As leaders or head diplomats of their respective nations, each role controls all facets of their country's relationship with this conflict including diplomatic support, negotiation, aid, trade etc.

Mozambique:

- President – **Samora Machel**

United Kingdom:

- Foreign Secretary – **David Owen**

Soviet Union:

- Minister of Foreign Affairs – **Andrei Gromyko**

China:

- Minister of Foreign Affairs – **Huang Hua**

South Africa:

- State President – **John Vorster**

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