



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC RAMBLINGS

27th July 2026

GREETINGS:

Good morning. Ramblings went silent when circumstances changed for the scribe, getting married, having an extended family that grew extensively and moving house all took its toll and he decided to take an open-ended sabbatical. It will be hard to replace his interest in matters military, so we won't replicate the past but just have a Newsletter at least once a month, and certainly before the next lunch gathering.

LUNCH COMING UP:

7th August lunch. A few weeks ago, there was a section of Carte Blanche (a well-known DSTV program for those that receive this passed on and are outside our borders) which looked at a couple of incidences where South African Airways operated internal flights in a time of really bad weather. They had to divert but were dangerously low on fuel and certainly below minimums as required. SAA wanted to carry more load and then just took on fuel required for a 'normal weather' flight. This interested several of us and we have asked Karl Jensen, well-respected retired SAA captain, to come along and give his view of the situation and tell us what the operations in his time would have done. He, naturally, won't be too critical of SAA but will be factual in good operating practice. Please make your reservation at bookings@rafoc.org and deposit your R350 pp into our account. It will be a member's lunch and male guests are welcome.

ON OUR DOORSTEP:

Zimbabwe's descent into dictatorship and the peril of African leaders' apathy - The Southern African Development Community's governments, with South Africa being the most powerful, have been watching Zimbabwe's slide into a constitutionally entrenched dictatorship in silence. This has consequences, not just for the country whose democracy is being killed, but for its neighbours as well.

Prominent Zimbabwean businessman and newspaper publisher Trevor Ncube penned a spine-chilling piece on Substack this week about how, in 2024 and 2025, newspapers in his stable were intimidated into to apologising for and withdrawing stories that revealed President Emmerson Mnangagwa's intention to extend his term beyond the constitutionally stipulated end in 2028.

The intimidation came in a writ from Mnangagwa's lawyers demanding that the respective stories be taken down within 48 hours or pay damages of up to \$22-million, which would accrue daily if not paid. On both occasions the newspapers, faced with the might of one of the country's most

formidable legal firms and representing the most powerful (and one with deep pockets), buckled. They knew their reporting was 100% on point but the idea of facing obviously malicious litigation that could bring them to their knees convinced them to live to fight another day.

Anyway, about two weeks ago, Mnangagwa signed constitutional amendments that will see him extend his term until 2030, what Ncube described as “the very outcome our newspapers warned about.” This is despite consistently denying for years that he had any such intentions and taking that drastic step of threatening *NewsDay* and *The Standard*.

The amendments will see the scheduled 2028 elections cast aside, the presidential and parliamentary terms increased from five years to seven and a shift from the system of the president being directly elected by voters to one where the head of state will be chosen by parliament. This may not sound controversial to South Africans where the president is elected by the National Assembly. There are many other jurisdictions around the world that operate this way, Zanu-PF and its apologists have argued, so it is not intrinsically undemocratic. They are not wrong.

Mnangagwa's legacy will be that of sending Zimbabwe's democracy to the cemetery and systematically replacing it with a constitutionally entrenched dictatorship.

However, this is not happening in a vacuum. Since the 2000 parliamentary election in which the Movement for Democratic Change's victory was snatched in broad daylight, the political system has been engineered to always deliver a Zanu-PF win. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is basically a Zanu-PF organ and has been indicted by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) observer mission as being an enabler of flawed elections. The tightly controlled state media that dominates the airwaves and whose print products are heavily supported by government advertising, is essentially the ruling party's propaganda arm. The security forces swear loyalty to the party hierarchy rather than the republic. The judiciary is packed with loyalists or mediocre beneficiaries of Zanu-PF favours.

So what do you have? A system designed to ensure permanent Zanu-PF parliamentary dominance and the presence of the party leader at the very helm. That 83-year-old Mnangagwa is that leader right now. He and his Zanu-PF successors are guaranteed the presidency through this cooked system. Where Robert Mugabe's legacy is that of choking Zimbabwe's democracy, Mnangagwa's will be that of sending it to the cemetery and systematically replacing it with a constitutionally entrenched dictatorship. By the time his extended term ends in 2030, only a fool would believe that his appetite for another term will have been satisfied. Let's brace ourselves for a repeat of Cameroon's Paul Biya, who contested an election at the age of 93.

Ncube today deeply regrets the decision to bow to the threats, calling it a “failure of courage”. He believes they should have stood their ground and damn the consequences.

“We were afraid. Afraid of a powerful president. Afraid of the enormous costs of defending ourselves in a judicial system over which the executive has accumulated disturbing influence. Afraid that even if our journalism was defensible, the process itself could cripple the business. That is what intimidation looks like when it arrives on a lawyer's letterhead,” Ncube wrote.

He added: “That experience taught me something important: authoritarian systems do not depend only on violent men and repressive laws. They depend on the fear of ordinary institutions.”

The people who should be hanging their heads for failure of courage, failure of conscience and failure of conviction are the leaders of our continent and in particular the SADC region.

DAILY MAVERICK 26 July 2026

OTHER BITS OF INTEREST:

Jeremy Clarkson has delivered a grim assessment of British farming, admitting he deliberately left hundreds of acres at Diddly Squat untouched this year because growing crops would have guaranteed him a financial loss.

The former Top Gear presenter, who has spent the past seven years running his Oxfordshire farm and documenting the highs and lows in Clarkson's Farm, said making money from growing food has become ‘quite simply impossible’.

Writing in his column for *The Sun*, the 66-year-old warned that the situation is only likely to deteriorate.

'Action is needed now because farmers have reached the point where it is quite simply impossible to make money from growing food,' he wrote.

'This year, I have 200 acres on my farm where we grew nothing at all. We knew that if we planted it with wheat or barley, we would definitely make a loss.'

Clarkson believes the outlook will become even bleaker next year, claiming the introduction of a Net Zero carbon tax on fertiliser will pile further pressure on an industry already struggling to stay afloat. He warned that today's countryside could look dramatically different within a generation. (Picture: He suggested farmers may soon have little choice but to abandon traditional food production in favour of more profitable alternatives.

Rather than growing crops to eat, Clarkson said landowners could find themselves renting fields to huge agricultural firms growing plants to power anaerobic digesters. Alternatively, he joked that farmers may as well install solar farms or build data centres instead.

(and I thought we were a nation that cared for our farmers. This is FOOD for thought)

IRAN THREATENS BRITAIN:

Iran has warned that Britain's RAF Fairford and the Royal Family are 'legitimate targets' after the US used the base to launch a B1 bomber raid.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) issued a statement that also made threatening remarks towards the 'British monarchy regime' if it continues to support America's war effort against Tehran.

'The aggressive US military, which had been using cruise missiles from its ships in the Indian Ocean in its aggressions after the official resumption of the war, turned to using B1 aircraft flying from Fairford Air Base in England as the missile reserves of the aforementioned ships ran out,' the statement said, according to the IRNA news agency. <https://mol.im/a/15999617>

IRAN WAR LATEST:

'They would use it if they had it' - Trump insists Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon. Donald Trump has said Iran would use a nuclear weapon if it had one - and the US is "not going to let that happen." It comes as Iran said it has targeted multiple US bases across the Middle East.

The UK says it is ready to defend itself, after Iran warned of "consequences" for opening its bases to the US military. A little earlier, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it "strongly condemns the decision "to allow the US's "illegal military attacks."

"Any party that participates in any way in committing military aggression against Iran will be responsible for the consequences...of its decision," a spokesperson said.

The UK's Ministry of Defence gave a stark response to Iran's threat: "Our Armed Forces are ready to keep the United Kingdom safe from any kind of attacks, whether it's on our soil or from abroad. The UK stands ready 24/7 to defend itself. "This includes through operating a layered approach to air and missile defence, provided by Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force assets equipped with a range of advanced capabilities, working closely with our NATO allies.

"The UK's approach to the conflict remains the same - we are committed to defending our people, our interests and our allies, acting in accordance with international law and not getting drawn into the wider conflict."

<https://news.sky.com/story/iran-war-latest-us-trump-attack-13509565?postid=12117284#liveblog-body>

TRUMP SAYS IRAN IS 'THE MOST SERIOUS THEY'VE BEEN SO FAR ABOUT TALKS' - AS HE WALKS BACK PLANS FOR 'MASSIVE ATTACK'

As we reported earlier, Donald Trump hosted an event in the White House on nuclear technology, and as expected, the Iran war came up. Here's what he said: Donald Trump said he believes Iran is being the most serious about negotiations they've been so far. Responding to questions in the Oval Office, the US president said he had "not made a decision on major strikes" against Iran, after previously telling Axios he was "considering a massive attack."

Trump appeared to somewhat row back on the attacks he had vowed the US was "all set for." "Right now, we're talking to them...so maybe there won't be a tipping point" that would trigger a massive attack, he said.

The US president also repeated many of the lines we've often heard from him. This included him saying the US and Iran could keep going the "way we are" or a deal could be made. Similarly, Trump insisted that he wasn't in a rush to stop the war, despite upcoming domestic elections.

RAF TYPHOONS LAUNCHED AFTER 'CONCERN' OVER FLIGHT:

Charis Scott-Holm East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire is a RAF Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) station which protects UK airspace and trains Typhoon pilots.

RAF Typhoons were scrambled from Lincolnshire to intercept a Qatar Airways flight, the Ministry of Defence has confirmed.

The jets took off from RAF Coningsby earlier after a Quick Reaction Alert relating to a passenger plane that was travelling to Manchester Airport from Doha. An RAF spokesperson said the flight was "causing concern to civil authorities."

"The incident was resolved and the airliner landed safely," they added - according to the Manchester Airport arrivals board, the flight landed at 19:45 BST 23rd July.

LEWIS HAMILTON QUESTIONS FERRARI CALL AT HUNGARIAN GP:

This is for the F1 followers, and I am one

Ferrari looked the team to beat through Friday practice, before reigning world champion Norris left his calling card ahead of qualifying. At the wheel of the upgraded McLaren, Norris went head-to-head with Hamilton, who was chasing a 10th pole at the Hungarian GP. Hamilton was one of several drivers who failed to improve on his final Q3 lap. Norris was not one of them.

A lap time of 1:17.207 from Norris earned him Hungarian Grand Prix pole by 0.012s (*if the car is traveling at 160km/hr then this is less than 1m difference*) from Hamilton.

"Lando did the job and did a great lap, and I didn't on the last one," said Hamilton after qualifying.

"I don't know why we went first, and that was a bit of a shock to me. I definitely wouldn't have chosen to go first, but it is what it is.

"I had a clean out-lap. When I started my lap, already in Turn 1, I had a snap, and I was already a tenth and a half down, and it just cascaded from there. "The last lap was the worst lap of all, and all the other laps were really good. So we clearly had the car to be on pole today, and I just didn't deliver. That's tough to swallow."

Classified P2, Hamilton came under FIA investigation post-qualifying for potentially impeding Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri during Q3. Hamilton received a three-place grid penalty. Immediately after qualifying, Hamilton offered a downbeat assessment of his prospects on Grand Prix Sunday. "It's obviously a track that I love. I think we're obviously competitive, but I think tomorrow's going to be a hard day," he suggested.

<https://www.msn.com/en-za/sports/motorsports/Lewis-Hamilton-questions-Ferrari-decision-after-lost-Hungarian-GP-pole>

AFRICA'S MISSING AVIATION FOUNDATION:

This is worth a read and very true having been a small airport operator in the USA. The article shortened and was by Derek Nseko – Jul 2023 and still relevant today.

Africa has tried to build an aviation industry from the top down. The world's strongest aviation nations built theirs from the bottom up. Extracts from an article by Derek Nseko Jul 23

Some weekends, a group of us would organise what pilots simply called a fly-in. Someone owned an aircraft. Someone else hired one from the flying club. Others were still students building hours toward their commercial licences. We'd agree on a destination, launch from different airfields and spend the weekend doing what aviators everywhere have done for a long time. Flying, learning and sharing stories over a 'braai' after sunset.

That was simply how aviation was introduced to me. And it almost felt like there was nothing remarkable about it.

What struck me most was not the aircraft themselves - and South Africa did serve up an interesting diversity of planes, but the world built around them. Every hour or so there seemed to be another

airstrip. Some were attached to farms, others to small towns, lodges or flying clubs. There was almost always somewhere to land, somewhere to refuel and someone waiting to talk about aeroplanes.

Flying was not confined to international airports behind security fences. It belonged to communities. Only after leaving South Africa did I realise how unusual that experience was.

Across much of Africa, we celebrate every new terminal, every aircraft delivery and every international route announcement. Governments proudly unveil airport expansion plans. National airlines dominate headlines. Aviation success is often measured by wide-body fleets and glossy infrastructure projects.

Yet the ecosystem that first makes people fall in love with flying is largely absent. And I have come to believe that this is one of the biggest reasons African aviation continues to struggle.

We have spent decades trying to build the top of the pyramid. We forgot the foundation.

But airlines represent only one part of aviation. The United States did not become the world's largest aviation nation because it built the biggest airlines. It became one because it built an extraordinary general aviation ecosystem. Just this week, over 700,000 aviation enthusiasts are celebrating aviation together in Oshkosh with more than 10,000 aircraft.

Australia, Canada and a few others followed a similar path. Long before their citizens boarded international flights, they were flying light aircraft between rural towns, learning at local aero clubs, restoring vintage aeroplanes in community hangars and spending weekends at small airfields.

General aviation became the nursery of the entire industry. Private pilots became airline captains. Flying clubs became talent pipelines. Weekend hobbyists became entrepreneurs, aircraft engineers, maintenance businesses and aviation innovators.

The world's strongest aviation industries were not built in airline boardrooms. They were built on grass strips.

General aviation is often misunderstood as aviation for the wealthy. In reality, it encompasses almost everything outside scheduled airline operations.

It includes flight training, agricultural aviation, air ambulances, firefighting, aerial surveying, conservation flying, business aviation, gliders, helicopters, recreational flying, parachuting, flight instruction and countless other activities that quietly support modern economies.

According to the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the United States is home to more than 220,000 general aviation aircraft and over 5,000 public-use airports, the overwhelming majority serving general aviation rather than airline traffic. The sector supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and contributes billions of dollars annually to the American economy through manufacturing, maintenance, tourism, training and business activity.

It is difficult to imagine such an ecosystem without first imagining the culture that sustains it. Children visit local airports on weekends. Parents and their children take discovery flights. Retired airline captains volunteer at flying clubs. Communities gather for fly-ins and airshows. Young engineers learn by restoring aircraft. Flying becomes part of ordinary life.

That culture creates demand. Demand creates businesses. Businesses create jobs. Jobs sustain aviation.

Much of Africa has approached aviation from the opposite direction. We have invested enormous political capital in building national airlines and international airports. We celebrate fleet announcements as milestones of national progress. Airport terminals have become architectural statements. Every new international route is treated as evidence that our aviation sector is moving forward.

Those investments do matter. Africa needs stronger airlines. It needs better airports. It needs greater connectivity. But we have concentrated almost exclusively on the visible symbols of aviation while neglecting the ecosystem beneath them.

In too many countries, aviation begins and ends at the airline terminal. Small airfields have deteriorated. Flying clubs have disappeared if ever they existed. Aircraft ownership remains prohibitively expensive. Recreational flying is rare.

Young people can spend their entire childhood dreaming of aviation without ever touching an aeroplane. The result is an aviation industry that often feels distant from the society it is meant to serve. People admire aviation. Few participate in it.

General aviation does something airlines cannot. It creates aviation communities and it increases access. A young student who spends weekends washing aircraft at a flying club is far more likely to become an engineer than someone who only watches aircraft depart through an airport window. A teenager who takes a discovery flight may become tomorrow's air traffic controller. A retired airline captain mentoring students preserves decades of experience that would otherwise disappear. Flying clubs create relationships. Airlines simply move passengers.

The two perform different functions, but one feeds the other. The economic argument is equally compelling. General aviation supports industries that rarely receive political attention.

Agricultural aircraft protect crops. Air ambulances save lives. Bush pilots connect remote communities. Conservation organisations monitor wildlife from the air. Survey aircraft support mining and infrastructure projects. Business aviation enables investment. Maintenance organisations employ skilled technicians. Flight schools train future airline pilots.

None of these activities require a Boeing 787. Most require something much smaller. And together they create an aviation economy that is far broader than commercial airlines alone.

There is another reason Africa should care. The continent's pilot shortage has become a recurring concern as airlines expand fleets and compete for talent. The conversation usually begins with airlines recruiting abroad or governments funding cadet programs.

But perhaps we are asking the wrong question. Where will the next generation of pilots first discover aviation? Not in an airline cockpit. In a Cessna, Piper, a glider or at a flying club.

The airline industry ultimately depends on an ecosystem it does not directly control.

South Africa demonstrates what is possible. Its network of flying schools, recreational pilots, private airfields, fly-ins and aviation organisations has created one of the continent's richest aviation cultures.

That may be the foundation Africa has been missing all along. Because the world's strongest aviation nations were never built from the top down. They were built from the grassroots up.

And perhaps Africa's next aviation breakthrough will begin not with another wide-body delivery or another gleaming terminal, but with a small aircraft lifting off from a local airstrip, carrying a young pilot who has just discovered the joy of flight.

Airspace World.