

RHINO KILLINGS ON THE RISE

**A troubling correlation between rhino killings
and the spreading Chinese footprint in
Southern Africa.**



Could the massive upswing in rhino poaching be linked to the flood of Chinese arms and a growing Chinese presence in Southern Africa?

Chinese weapons are now being recovered in rhino killing incidents at a noticeable frequency, and reports of rhino poaching in areas where Chinese newcomers are working on infrastructure projects are intensifying.

Counter poaching operatives in Southern Africa have recovered numerous Chinese weapons in rhino and elephant killing incidents.

Southern Africa ‘flooded’ with Chinese weapons

Readers may recall the April 2008 incident involving the Chinese ship *An Yue Jiang*, which was found to be carrying 77 tons of Chinese assault rifles and other weaponry destined for Zimbabwe. The *New York Times* reported that the Chinese state-owned arms company, Poly Technologies, Inc., manufactured the load of weapons, worth an estimated \$1.245 million.¹

South Africa refused to allow the ship to unload its nefarious cargo at the port of Durban.

Closure (of sorts) was eventually brought to the debacle when international media sources reported that the *An Yue Jiang* was headed for Angola. However, a statement issued

by Angola’s state press said the ship would only be allowed to unload “merchandise destined for Angola”, which prompted the ship to apparently be recalled to China.²

Sources outside the media disagree, claiming that Mozambican trade unions revealed that the ship had actually docked during the night in Maputo harbour, where the weapons were unloaded and then transported across the Mozambique-Zimbabwe border.

The claim is a plausible one; there certainly does not appear to be a shortage of Chinese arms in the area.

Shortly after the *An Yue Jiang* incident, reporter Andrew Malone said that a squad of the China People’s Liberation Army was very visible in the city of Mutare³, near Zimbabwe’s border with Mozambique.

And for the last two years, counter poaching operatives in Southern Africa have recovered numerous Chinese arms in rhino and elephant killing incidents.

They say the region is “flooded” with Chinese assault rifles, ammunition, and other weaponry.



Chinese AKM Type 56-1 and 56-2 assault rifles recovered in counter poaching operations, Southern Africa. (Courtesy of Kevin Bewick.)

Mozambique border a ‘hot zone’ in battle to protect rhinos

The open international boundary which runs through the Great Limpopo Transfrontier is an area of particular concern.

National Geographic’s Leon Marshall wrote that the boundary has become a “hot zone” in the war to protect rhinos.

He cited a figure of 60 rhinos slaughtered along the South Africa-Mozambique border⁴, just over 30 percent of the total rhinos killed during the first seven months of 2010.

Recently, intelligence sources from South Africa have linked the expanding Chinese workforce in Mozambique to concentrated killings of rhinos and elephants in the region of Zimbabwe, the eastern border of Kruger National Park, and KwaZulu-Natal.

The same reports mention that a contingency of Chinese road workers are based near the southeast corner of Cabora Bassa Dam, situated in the Tete Province of northern Mozambique. It is believed that “orders” for rhino horn are originating from this area.

Perhaps not coincidentally, five people of Chinese origin were arrested in 2009 for illegally entering the Ophathe game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, where at least 11 rhinos were killed.⁵

The Chinese suspects were believed to be shop owners in Ulundi.⁶

At least 17 rhinos were killed in KwaZulu-Natal during the first ten months of 2010.⁷

Demand ‘perilously’ close to the supply

An eerily similar situation had already emerged in Kenya.

Last year, it became well known that elephant killings had surged in the areas where Chinese workers were constructing roads in Kenya.

Moses Litroh, elephant program coordinator for the Kenya Wildlife Service was quoted in the UK’s *Telegraph* as saying that more than 50 percent of the dead elephants had

been found in the vicinity of Chinese road projects⁸, and that the coincidence was of “great concern”.

Not surprisingly, China has staunchly denied any connection to elephant poaching in Kenya.⁹

Wildlife service officials also said that the majority of ivory smugglers arrested at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi were Chinese nationals, some of them carrying up to 110kg of raw or carved tusks.

The *Financial Times* cited Barbara Maas, CEO of Care for the Wild International, who said that the rising number of Chinese nationals in Africa has placed the frontline between supply and demand for ivory perilously close.¹⁰

And the same deadly market forces appear to be working against rhinos.



Chinese AKM armor piercing rounds recovered in counter poaching operations, Southern Africa. (Courtesy of Kevin Bewick.)

Southern Africa’s vanishing rhinos

The number of rhinos killed in South Africa during 2010 has been estimated between 227 - 270 (as of October 2010), already doubling 2009’s death toll.

Between 2006 and 2009, Zimbabwe lost over a quarter of its rhino population.¹¹ Only around 700 rhinos are believed to remain in Zimbabwe.¹²

Mozambique’s entire rhino population is estimated to consist of nine Southern white rhinos.¹³

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