

# Militarized Conservation and the Struggle to Save South Africa's Rhinos

## by Chrisanne Kouzas

In response to a surge in rhino poaching in its national parks, the South African government has implemented a militarized anti-poaching strategy which has had little success in stopping poaching syndicates. I argue that the primary obstacle in efforts to curb rhino poaching in South Africa is the ambiguity that exists within the government over whether rhino poaching is a security issue or an environmental conservation issue. I show how this ambiguity reduces the amount of funding and resources allocated towards stopping poaching; hampers efforts to create new policy to prevent poaching; and negatively impacts collaborative efforts between countries to disrupt the activities of international poaching syndicates.

South Africa has seen a surge in rhino poaching over the past decade,<sup>1</sup> with over 7100 rhino killed for their horn in the country since 2007.<sup>2</sup> The South African government has responded to this problem by designating rhino poaching as both a “national priority crime”<sup>3</sup> and a “national security issue.”<sup>4</sup> Central to this response is the government’s implementation of a militarized anti-poaching strategy in which the South African Army is deployed to patrol national parks, with

soldiers and park rangers armed and instructed to shoot poachers on sight.<sup>5</sup> This militarized approach is commonly referred to by the government and general public as “the war on poaching,”<sup>6</sup> and by scholars as “the ‘rhinofication’ of South African security.”<sup>7</sup> These terms are misleading, however, because in South Africa rhino poaching is officially classified as an environmental issue, an area for which the Department of Environmental Affairs - not the State

<sup>1</sup> “Rhino Poaching Statistics Update,” Department of Environmental Affairs, March 1, 2018, [https://www.environment.gov.za/projectsprogrammes/rhinodialogues/poaching\\_statistics#2016](https://www.environment.gov.za/projectsprogrammes/rhinodialogues/poaching_statistics#2016); Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 6.

<sup>2</sup> “South Africa: Rhino Poaching in 2017 Almost Matches 2016 Figure, with KwaZulu Natal Now Bearing the Brunt,” TRAFFIC: Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network, January, 25 2018, <http://www.traffic.org/home/2018/1/25/south-africa-rhino-poaching-in-2017-almost-matches-2016-figu.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Minister Edna Molewa Highlights Progress in the Fight Against Rhino Poaching,” Department of Environmental Affairs, September 11, 2016, [https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa\\_highlightsprogress\\_onrhino\\_poaching2016](https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa_highlightsprogress_onrhino_poaching2016).

<sup>4</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinofication’ of South African Security,” 800.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 806.

<sup>6</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 9.

<sup>7</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinofication’ of South African security,” 796.

Security Agency - is responsible.<sup>8</sup> Despite the Department of Environmental Affairs strengthening anti-poaching efforts since 2009, the number of rhino attacked for their horn continues to rise each year.<sup>9</sup> This raises the question of why an increase in militarized anti-poaching efforts has not translated to a decrease in poaching activity. I argue that the primary obstacle in efforts to curb rhino poaching in South Africa is the ambiguity that exists within the government over whether rhino poaching is a security issue or an environmental conservation issue. I show how this ambiguity reduces the amount of funding and resources allocated towards anti-poaching efforts; hampers efforts to create new policy to prevent poaching; and negatively impacts collaborative efforts between countries to disrupt the activities of international poaching syndicates. These challenges are exacerbated by deeply entrenched

corruption within the South African government.<sup>10</sup>

### Causes of Rhino Poaching in South Africa: Supply and Demand

Approximately 70% of the world's rhino live in South Africa, which is home to an estimated 18 000 white and 1800 black rhino.<sup>11</sup> Over the past decade, the country has seen a surge in rhino poaching, with at least 7100 rhino killed since January 2007.<sup>12</sup> Incidents of rhino poaching are increasing at an exponential rate, with an increase in deaths of over 9000% from 2007 to 2017.<sup>13</sup> These aggressive rates are driven by a demand for rhino horn in Southeast Asia and China,<sup>14</sup> supported by thriving regional economies and a growing middle class with high disposable incomes.<sup>15</sup> Initially, demand for rhino horn was fueled by its use in traditional medicines, and in particular, the widely-held belief that it could cure cancer.<sup>16</sup> However, in recent years,

<sup>8</sup> "About Us," South African National Parks, <https://www.sanparks.org/about/>; Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 20.

<sup>9</sup> Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 6.

<sup>10</sup> *AlJazeera*, "S African Minister,"; Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 27.

<sup>11</sup> Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 6.

<sup>12</sup> "Minister Edna Molewa Highlights Progress in the Fight Against Rhino Poaching," Department of Environmental Affairs, September 11, 2016, [https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa\\_highlightsprogress\\_onrhinopoaching2016](https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa_highlightsprogress_onrhinopoaching2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Aylng, "What Sustains Wildlife Crime?" 61.

<sup>15</sup> Truong, et al., "The Marketplace Management," 3.

<sup>16</sup> Aylng, "What Sustains Wildlife Crime?" 61.

increasing demand for rhino horn is due to its value as a symbol of wealth, with the horn being carved into jewellery or ornaments for those who can afford it.<sup>17</sup>

This unquenched demand for rhino horn, coupled with restricted supply due to a CITES<sup>18</sup> ban on the international trade in rhino products,<sup>19</sup> has resulted in an estimated black market price of \$65 000 per kilogram (with a single horn weighing 6-7kg),<sup>20</sup> making it more expensive in weight than gold or cocaine.<sup>21</sup> These high black market prices in combination with increasing economic ties between Asia and Africa<sup>22</sup> have created a sophisticated transnational criminal network specializing in the illicit trade of rhino horn.<sup>23</sup> At the lowest level of these networks are the poachers who enter South African game parks in the

middle of the night to search for rhino.<sup>24</sup>

### Sites of Rhino Poaching: The Kruger National Park

South Africa's Kruger National Park (KNP) holds approximately 50% of the world's remaining rhinos,<sup>25</sup> making it both "the world's single most important site of rhino conservation,"<sup>26</sup> and "the world's most concentrated site of commercial rhino poaching,"<sup>27</sup> with an average of 2-3 rhino killed per night in the Park since 2012.<sup>28</sup> The KNP is at the centre of the battle against rhino poaching, not only because it is home to the world's largest concentration of rhinos, but also because it is part of a larger transfrontier conservation area (the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park)<sup>29</sup> spanning over the borders with

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is a multilateral treaty that protects endangered plants and animals. CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls; "What is CITES?" Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/what.php>.

<sup>19</sup> Truong, et al., "The Marketplace Management," 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ayling, "What Sustains Wildlife Crime?" 64; Child, "The Sustainable Use Approach," 1.

<sup>21</sup> Truong, et al., "The Marketplace Management," 3.

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, "Legal Ivory Trade," 55.

<sup>23</sup> Ayling, "What Sustains Wildlife Crime?" 64.

<sup>24</sup> *Al Jazeera*, "The Poachers Pipeline."

<sup>25</sup> Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 7.

<sup>26</sup> Lunstrum, "Green Militarization," 820.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 816.

<sup>28</sup> Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 8.

<sup>29</sup> "Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park," Peace Parks Foundation, <http://www.peaceparks.org/tfca.php?pid=27&mid=1005>.

Zimbabwe and Mozambique.<sup>30</sup> Within this area, the borders between South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe are unfenced to allow the free movement of animals along their natural migratory paths and prevent the islandization<sup>31</sup> of species.<sup>32</sup> The unfenced border between South Africa and Mozambique is approximately 400 km long,<sup>33</sup> and the size of the KNP is 19 485 km<sup>2</sup> (the size of Israel).<sup>34</sup> At any given time, there are approximately 220 rangers patrolling this area, which equates to roughly one ranger for every 90 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>35</sup> The combination of these factors - the high concentration of rhino on the South African side of the park, the large size of the area that needs to be monitored for poachers, a severe shortage of rangers, and the length of the open border between South Africa and Mozambique - creates a unique set of challenges in the struggle to prevent rhino-

poaching, and significantly hampers counter-poaching efforts.

The main challenge is the open border with Mozambique. Most of the poachers who operate in the KNP are Mozambican,<sup>36</sup> and enter the Park at night in groups of three or four<sup>37</sup> by crossing over from Mozambique into South Africa via the open border in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated that at least 7500 poachers entered the KNP in 2015,<sup>39</sup> with 5-15 groups of poachers operating in the park at any given time.<sup>40</sup> The poachers arm themselves against both animals and humans: “one man will carry a rifle fitted with a silencer, a second an axe or machete and a third...will be armed with an AK-47 assault rifle.”<sup>41</sup> Poachers have also been found carrying pistols, hand grenades and even RPG-7 rocket grenades.<sup>42</sup> Of these weapons, only the rifle and the axe/machete are used to

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<sup>30</sup> Büscher and Ramutsindela, “Green Violence,” 6; Duffy, “The Potential and Pitfalls,” 90-91.

<sup>31</sup> Islandization or habitat fragmentation is the subdivision of a previous continuous habitat either by natural or artificial barriers (e.g. roads); Hanski and Triantis, “Habitat Fragmentation,” 989.

<sup>32</sup> Duffy, “The Potential and Pitfalls,” 95.

<sup>33</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>36</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 822.

<sup>37</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 11.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>42</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 822.

shoot and dehorn the rhino,<sup>43</sup> the rest are used for defense against park rangers.<sup>44</sup> Once they have shot the rhino and removed its horns - a process which only takes a few minutes<sup>45</sup> - the poachers run back over the border into Mozambique where they cannot be pursued by South African rangers.<sup>46</sup> This problem is perhaps best described by the former head of South African National Parks (SANParks), David Mabunda, who referred to the cooperation between the two countries on anti-poaching efforts as “dismal,”<sup>47</sup> adding that “a poacher will run across the border and fire victory shots...he will sit in sight of the ranger and smoke because rangers dare not cross that line...should a SANParks official or a soldier shoot a poacher across the border it would create a serious international incident and might be seen as an act of war.”<sup>48</sup> Once back in Mozambique, the poachers, along with the rhino horn, can essentially disappear.<sup>49</sup> This is not only because “especially compared to South Africa, Mozambique has

extremely lax wildlife legislation that is poorly enforced”<sup>50</sup> but also because the poachers are protected by local Mozambican communities bordering the park who have not benefited from the conservation economy but have been enriched through poaching activities, with poachers being paid up to \$20 000/rhino by criminal syndicates.<sup>51</sup> Efforts to stop poachers once they have entered Mozambique are further hampered by the fact that South Africa and Mozambique do not have an extradition treaty, and that smugglers are able to use Mozambique’s ports to move the horn out of the country.<sup>52</sup> This amounts to a situation in which there is a great need for South Africa to catch poachers while they are still in the KNP.

### **Government Response: Militarized Conservation and Securitized Rhetoric**

SANParks, the body of the South African Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) responsible for

<sup>43</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 12.

<sup>44</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 823.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 824.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 822-823.

<sup>47</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinofication’ of South African Security,” 808.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 808.

<sup>49</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 823.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 822.

<sup>51</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 830; Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 12.

<sup>52</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 823.

managing the country's national parks,<sup>53</sup> has responded to the challenges posed by the open border with Mozambique and the associated increase in poaching activity in the KNP with a militarized counter-poaching campaign.<sup>54</sup> The government justifies this approach with the argument that “the problem, to which the militarization of Kruger and the international border is the solution, is not merely one of poachers killing rhinos. Instead, the problem is one of armed foreign nationals transgressing the international border and violating national sovereignty to decimate South Africa's natural heritage.”<sup>55</sup> In line with this view, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has deployed troops to patrol the Mozambique border in the KNP as part of ‘Operation Rhino’ since 2009,<sup>56</sup> and retired army Major-General of the SANDF, Johan Jooste, was appointed to head up the KNP's counter-poaching unit in 2012.<sup>57</sup> The anti-poaching campaign was also extended on the ground with the addition of a

canine unit,<sup>58</sup> and in the air with drones and a spotter-plane provided by South Africa's state-owned arms corporation.<sup>59</sup>

The implementation of this militarized anti-poaching campaign in the KNP has been accompanied by the government's adoption of anti-poaching rhetoric strongly infused with military terminology.<sup>60</sup> Most notably, General Jooste's first statement in his capacity as head of SANPark's counter-poaching unit was: “The battle lines have been drawn and it is up to my team and me to forcefully push back the frontiers of poaching. It is a fact that South Africa, a sovereign country, is under attack from armed foreign nationals. This should be seen as a declaration of war...We are going to take the war to these armed bandits and we aim to win it.”<sup>61</sup> This type of talk has become typical of SANParks and government officials, for example, in 2010 David Mabunda (then head of SANParks) referred to anti-poaching efforts in the KNP as a “low intensity war”;<sup>62</sup> in 2012

<sup>53</sup> “About Us,” South African National Parks, <https://www.sanparks.org/about/>.

<sup>54</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 10.

<sup>55</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 827.

<sup>56</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinofication’ of South African Security,” 805.

<sup>57</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 9.

<sup>58</sup> Avery, “Anti-Poaching Pooches.”

<sup>59</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinofication’ of South African Security,” 806.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 807.

<sup>61</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 9.

<sup>62</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinofication’ of South African Security,” 807.

Fundisile Mketeni (then deputy director-general for biodiversity and conservation in the DEA) stated that “we are now at war” with rhino poachers;<sup>63</sup> in 2013 Ike Phaahla (a SANParks spokesperson) called it a “military incursion”;<sup>64</sup> and in 2016 Edna Molewa (South Africa’s Environment Minister) referred to the counter-poaching campaign in the KNP as “the war on poaching”<sup>65</sup> and stated that “we see it as a war and will fight it as such.”<sup>66</sup> This common use of warlike rhetoric by the DEA and SANParks officials to frame the issue of rhino poaching makes a lack of similar statements, or indeed *any* statements regarding rhino poaching at all, from the South African State Security Agency (SSA) conspicuous in its absence. This is reflective of a broader problem in South Africa’s anti-poaching campaign, that is, the ambiguity that exists within the government over whether the ‘war on poaching’ is a state security issue or an environmental conservation issue.

## Ambiguity and Diffusion of Responsibility: The DEA and SSA

Officially, rhino poaching is classified as a conservation issue, which falls under the umbrella of the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). However, rhino poaching has also become a security issue, because of the need to secure South Africa’s borders, deploy the army, and prevent incursions from groups of armed foreign nationals who attack both rhinos and rangers. For these reasons, rhino poaching is also a concern of the State Security Agency (SSA). Because it has become a dual-agency concern, rhino poaching falls into a grey area where neither the DEA or SSA is fully responsible for dealing with the problem. On one hand, the actual strategies being employed on the ground involve the use of military personnel and expensive military equipment, but on the other hand, the burden of funding and policy creation lies with an environmental agency that is relatively small and powerless. This ambiguity has an overall negative impact on the success of rhino conservation efforts for four main reasons: (1) it reduces the amount of

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<sup>63</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

funding and resources allocated towards anti-poaching efforts; (2) negatively impacts the priority rhino poaching is assigned on the national agenda; (3) obstructs collaborative efforts between countries to disrupt the activities of international poaching syndicates; and (4) hampers efforts to create new policy to prevent poaching. These challenges are exacerbated by deeply entrenched corruption within the South African government.<sup>67</sup>

### *1. Funding and Resources:*

Despite the war-charged rhetoric from SANParks and DEA officials, and the situation on the ground in the KNP being warlike, anti-poaching efforts are funded entirely by the DEA and not the SSA.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the DEA “received less than 1% of the total government budget in 2015 (R5.68 billion) of which funding to SANParks represented only 5% of the environmental ministry’s budget.”<sup>69</sup> In comparison to this, the defence budget for the same year was R172 billion<sup>70</sup> but none of this was allocated towards the fight against rhino poaching, or even border protection in the KNP.

The fact that the DEA, which has a much smaller budget than the SSA, has to pay to secure the country’s borders is both irregular and counterproductive, and takes away funding that could be used, for example, to hire more rangers, expand the canine unit, or transport rhinos into safer areas within the KNP.<sup>71</sup> The ambiguity surrounding the status of rhino conservation has thus had a negative effect on the amount of funding directed towards rhino conservation efforts, and by extension on the success of the rhino conservation program.

### *2. Prioritization of Rhino Poaching on the National Agenda*

The differences in funding received by the DEA compared to the SSA, also hint that, “if budgets are an indicator of the importance of a portfolio, then environmental and conservation concerns are among the least of the government’s worries”<sup>72</sup> This points to an ambiguity in the priority of rhino conservation on the national agenda: on one hand government officials from the DEA and SANParks are making statements about how there is a full-

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<sup>67</sup> *AlJazeera*, “S African Minister.”; Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 27.

<sup>68</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 17.

<sup>69</sup> Shaw and Rademeyer, “A Flawed War,” 179.

<sup>70</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 17.

blown “insurgency war”<sup>73</sup> occurring in the KNP, and how rhino poaching has become a “National Priority Crime,”<sup>74</sup> but on the other hand the South African government has many other larger priorities including “rising levels of violent crime, a stagnant economy, widespread unemployment, labour unrest, service delivery protests, a failing schooling system, a lack of housing, entrenched corruption and dysfunctional police, defence, intelligence and prosecutions structures.”<sup>75</sup> This problem is not unique to South Africa, but forms part of a global trend in which many countries, particularly in the Global South, are weakened in their ability to tackle wildlife crime by small conservation budgets and environmental concerns ranking low on the list of government priorities.<sup>76</sup> This is somewhat paradoxical, because wildlife conservation in general is an important sector for tourism and job creation, and in this way it is a mechanism through which governments in developing countries,

including South Africa, can begin to address key issues like unemployment, poverty and economic development.<sup>77</sup>

### *3. International Efforts to Disrupt Transnational Poaching Syndicates*

Mirroring government ambiguity in South Africa over whether rhino poaching is an environmental or a security issue is the fact that there has been, until fairly recently, a lack of international consensus on the threat of wildlife crime to national security, with the “links between transnational organised crime, wildlife trafficking and regional security”<sup>78</sup> only acknowledged by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly for the first time in 2012.<sup>79</sup> This continues to impact both the priority given to wildlife crime on an international level, and the ability of countries to cooperate in the fight against transnational organized crime networks specializing in the trade of rhino horn, elephant ivory and products from other endangered species.<sup>80</sup> This is significant because for every poacher shot or arrested by a

<sup>73</sup> Humphreys and Smith, “The ‘Rhinification’ of South African Security,” 807.

<sup>74</sup> “Minister Edna Molewa Highlights Progress in the Fight Against Rhino Poaching,” Department of Environmental Affairs, September 11, 2016, [https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa\\_highlightsprogress\\_onrhinopoaching2016](https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/molewa_highlightsprogress_onrhinopoaching2016).

<sup>75</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 17.

<sup>76</sup> “CITES CoP17: Untouchable? Criminal Networks, Traffickers and the Illicit Trade in Rhino Horn,” YouTube.

<sup>77</sup> Aylward and Lutz, *Nature Tourism*, 14; Barbee, “World’s First All-Female.”

<sup>78</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 18.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>80</sup> “CITES CoP17: Untouchable? Criminal Networks, Traffickers and the Illicit Trade in Rhino Horn,” YouTube.

ranger in the KNP, there are many more willing to take his place.<sup>81</sup> Thus, while the militarized approach on the ground is necessary for the immediate protection of the rhinos given the number of poachers operating in the park, in order to truly weaken the transnational crime networks behind rhino poaching, countries around the world, and particularly along the supply chain for rhino horn (e.g. Vietnam), need to be able to share information and coordinate against poaching networks in the same way that they do in efforts to curb the international drug trade. Thus, as long as the ambiguity over the status of wildlife crime on a domestic and international level persists, so too will the criminal syndicates behind it.

#### *4. Policy Creation*

Ambiguity concerning the status of poaching as an environmental versus a security concern impacts policy creation and security coordination against poaching syndicates on a domestic level in a similar way to how it does on an international level. A report presented at the 2011 United Nations Climate Change Conference (CoP17) in South Africa last year describes how “for much of the last decade, the DEA has been the de facto

lead agency in developing and driving the country’s strategic and policy responses to rhino poaching and organised wildlife crime. It was the DEA not law enforcement and security agencies that, together with SANParks, drafted the first ‘safety and security strategy’ for the country’s rhino populations. It was the DEA not the police or justice ministries - that negotiated bilateral agreements with Vietnam, China and Mozambique.”<sup>82</sup> While this in itself is impressive given the lack of funding and resources allocated to the DEA, it seems strange that the DEA is solely responsible for this type of policy creation given the status of rhino poaching as a ‘national priority crime’ and the apparent threat of poaching syndicates to national security. Ultimately, ambiguity in the classification of rhino conservation efforts has prevented the expertise of law enforcement agencies, the police, and justice ministries from being harnessed to create policy in the fight against poaching syndicates.

Despite the progress that the DEA has made in creating policy and agreements to assist conservation efforts, a problem that has stemmed from ambiguity regarding whether

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<sup>81</sup> Lunstrum, “Green Militarization,” 821.

<sup>82</sup> Rademeyer, “Tipping Point,” 17.

rhino conservation is an environmental or security issue, is the relative weakness of SANParks vis à vis the SSA in determining security policy.<sup>83</sup> Shaw and Rademeyer provide an example that illustrates this problem well:

“An American university made contact in January 2014 to ask advice for the implementation of an intelligence collection and collation project on rhino poaching. The project was to be funded by the US State Department and involved support for intelligence sharing, analysis and the creation of a database. An application was made to the relevant structures of the South African state and after a long period of deliberation and an initial agreement and encouragement from SANParks that it could go ahead, it was turned down.”<sup>84</sup>

Here, the decision on whether to authorize a project which could significantly help rhino conservation efforts, and that would allow for information sharing between countries in the fight against the transnational criminal syndicates behind the illicit

poaching business, which was approved by SANParks ultimately did not go ahead because it was blocked by the SSA. In this case, the negative impact on anti-poaching efforts caused by the ambiguity over who should be able to have the final say on security decisions regarding conservation efforts is striking. This case also casts doubt over whether ‘the war on rhino poaching’ is really a priority of the SSA. Indeed, Shaw and Rademeyer point out that the decision to block SANParks’ decision “is the opposite of the ‘rhinosification’ of the security agenda.”<sup>85</sup>

While Shaw and Rademeyer attribute this to the government having “very real suspicions of western and external interference in South African security issues,”<sup>86</sup> the possible role of corruption having an impact on decisions like these should not be discounted. An Al Jazeera in-depth investigation into the rhino horn trade published in November 2016, exposed deep-rooted connections between the South African Minister of State Security, David Mahlobo, and the illegal rhino horn trade.<sup>87</sup> With corruption present at every level of the

<sup>83</sup> Shaw and Rademeyer “A Flawed War,” 181.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *AlJazeera*, “S African Minister.”

South African government,<sup>88</sup> including the police and SANDF,<sup>89</sup> it is not inconceivable that Mahlobo, in his capacity as head of the SSA, could have blocked the decision to approve the USA-South Africa information and intelligence sharing project to protect his own interests. Corruption in South Africa in general has hampered efforts to counter-poaching activity there have been multiple incidents in which corrupt park rangers, SANDF soldiers, government officials, diplomats, private game farm owners, police officers, and customs and border officials have been implicated in rhino poaching syndicates.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

Government ambiguity over whether the problem of rhino conservation in South Africa is an environmental conservation issue or a security issue has an overall negative impact on the amount of funding that is allocated to anti-poaching efforts, the ability of government to create new policy to curb poaching, the priority rhino poaching is assigned on the national

agenda, and efforts between countries to collaborate to disrupt the activities of international poaching syndicates. This has significantly hampered efforts to stop rhino poaching in the country's national parks by creating a situation in which the militarized counter-poaching campaign implemented on the ground in the KNP is not supported by a transparent, integrated strategy in government to fight the resilient transnational crime networks behind poaching. The growing global trend<sup>91</sup> in militarizing conservation efforts means that the challenges South Africa faces in preventing poaching are significant beyond the country's own borders. As other developing countries, such as Kenya,<sup>92</sup> Namibia,<sup>93</sup> and India,<sup>94</sup> share similar problems to South Africa in achieving their conservation goals, there is both a need and an opportunity for information sharing, policy creation, and more international agreements between countries to aid conservation efforts and reduce wildlife crime globally.

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<sup>88</sup> Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 27.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>90</sup> Rademeyer, "Tipping Point," 14.

<sup>91</sup> Duffy, "Waging a War to Save Biodiversity," 819.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 826.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 826.

<sup>94</sup> Lopes, "Civil Unrest," 20.

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