

# South African Journal *of Military Science*

## Editorial

From a defence and security point of view, the first half of 2023 continued to be overshadowed by the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian War, which has now moved into its second year. In essence, the war in Ukraine began in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and supported separatist rebels in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The conflict escalated into a full-scale war, with both sides engaging in military action and suffering significant casualties. However, in February 2022, there was a significant escalation of the conflict when Russia launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine, which was met with fierce resistance from the Ukrainian military. The fighting caused widespread destruction and displacement, with many civilians fleeing their homes and even the country. Throughout the following months, the conflict continued to intensify, with both sides suffering heavy losses, specifically during the major fighting around Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Mariupol and most recently Bakhmut. The Ukrainian military continues to receive significant support from Western countries, including military equipment and training, which helps to boost their capabilities, performance and resolve on the battlefield. International condemnation of Russian actions remains widespread, specifically from Western countries, with several countries enforcing sanctions on Russia. The conflict also continues to have vast geopolitical implications, with tensions continuing to rise between Russia and the West. As of May 2023, the situation in the region remains volatile, with no clear resolution in sight.

The ongoing Russo–Ukrainian War has caught the attention of military practitioners and scholars worldwide, as it offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of modern warfare and international relations. The war has also shed light on enduring superpower competition, hybrid or conventional warfare, force structure and deployment, defence policy, military alliances, doctrine, intelligence, and coalition operations. These issues remain pertinent, and will continue to generate academic interest regardless of the duration and outcome of the war.

Whilst the international geopolitical attention remains fixed on the events in Eastern Europe, the armed conflict that erupted in Sudan in April 2023 between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAA) of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has partly shifted the focus to Africa. The conflict started with a series of attacks by the RSF on key government infrastructure and buildings, followed by airstrikes, as well as artillery and gunfire reported across large parts of Sudan, including the capital city Khartoum. By the end of April, both Dagalo’s RSF and Fattah al-Burhan’s SAA claimed control over several critical government sites in Khartoum.

The escalating conflict between the RSF and the SAA has pushed Sudan towards a renewed civil war, particularly with several peace efforts failing after repeated violations of agreed-upon ceasefires between the opposing groups. Nationally, the sprawling conflict in Sudan has intensified the fragility of the state, leading to waves of displacement, deprivation, large-scale human suffering, and loss of life. However, regionally, the conflict has far-reaching consequences, including increased geopolitical instability in the already unstable Horn of Africa, compounded by a growing number of refugees seeking safety across the region. Currently, the situation in the area remains volatile, with no clear resolution in sight, and the stark possibility of a full-scale civil war that may erupt.

In Southern Africa, the focus is currently centred on the continuous operational deployment of Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Rwandan troops to the uncontrolled area of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique. Their aim is to combat the insurgents linked to Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama (al-Shabaab). Despite the earlier successes of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) between October 2021 and January 2022, it appears that, during the latter half of 2022, the operational initiative has once again shifted in favour of the insurgents, leading to the extension of the SADC mission. Previously, the reduction in insurgent attacks allowed SAMIM to shift its focus from being a purely interventionist group to being a more complex and multidimensional peacekeeping force. This change in mandate necessitated reinforcement of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) contingent deployed to Mozambique as part of the regional task force, which previously consisted primarily of special forces. As a result, from May 2022 onward, elements of Combat Team Alpha were dispatched to the Mihluri Base in Macomia in northern Mozambique to assist in countering the Islamic insurgency.

However, despite these advancements, critical issues – such as post-conflict reconstruction and development, the restoration and maintenance of law and order, the provision of essential services, and addressing the root causes of the insurgency – have not received sufficient attention in public and academic discussions. Additionally, despite an increase in the number of forces in the SAMIM mission, the security situation in Cabo Delgado does not appear to have stabilised in the first half of 2023, with periodic insurgent attacks and outbreaks of violence. In fact, the larger issues of peacebuilding and stabilisation remain wanting. The SAMIM forces too appear to be underfunded and lacking the necessary aerial assets and military equipment to conduct fire-force and hot-pursuit missions as and when required. Moreover, the military operating environment in northern Mozambique proves extremely challenging to conduct counterinsurgency operations and, in fact, allows Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama fighters to exploit the harsh climate and terrain in their conduct of the insurgency successfully. The deployment of South African troops as part of the SAMIM mission also continues to stimulate debate in academic and military circles and provides a valuable perspective to explore topics such as doctrine, force structure and design, military operations, defence policy, and alliances.

In this issue of *Scientia Militaria*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2023, the articles consider both historic and contemporary issues associated with war and conflict, as well as defence and security-related matters. As always, it is trusted that these articles will provide key insights and act as a source of influence for individuals involved in the broader ambit of military planning, operations, management, and higher education.



The article by Theo Neethling, from the University of the Free State, reports on the role of the infamous Wagner Group as a foreign policy instrument of the Russian government on the African continent. The article specifically presents an analysis of the activities of the Wagner Group in four African countries, namely Libya, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Mali. Neethling argues that the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, has become a significant tool in the Kremlin's foreign policy arsenal. In fact, he states that it can be seen as a quasi-state actor and a proxy institution for the Russian government. With a global presence, the operations of the Wagner Group are the subject of controversy, especially on the African continent. Russian interest in Africa is primarily to expand its geopolitical influence and counter Western powers. Of note is that operations by the Wagner Group are carried out in fragile African states with abundant resources, often in the midst of conflict or insecurity.

In his article, Joseph Adebayo, from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, explores the 20-year military involvement of the United States of America in Afghanistan to proffer possible lessons for the involvement of the South African government in countering the current Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama insurgency in Mozambique. In mid-2021, the South African government dispatched troops from the SANDF to the troubled Northern Province of Mozambique as part of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional force to counter the insurgent threat in the country. It is noteworthy that this deployment occurred around the same time that the United States completed its withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan after twenty years of military involvement. Afghanistan subsequently descended into chaos, with the Taliban taking over the government, leading to a renewed discussion on the viability of military interventions and so-called "stability operations". Various reasons have been put forward for the perceived failure of America in Afghanistan, including the policymakers' inability to comprehend the role of ethnicity, religion, and tribalism in conflict dynamics. Although the socio-political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural contexts of the SA intervention in Mozambique differ from those of the United States in Afghanistan, Adebayo shows that there are lessons that South Africa could learn to avoid similar pitfalls.

The article by Leon Steyn, from Stellenbosch University, aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the first permanent appointment of women in the South African Navy (SAN) in 1972 and 1973. Steyn argues that the service of women in the SAN can be divided into three distinct periods. The first of these was the service of the so-called Swans with the South African Naval Forces during the Second World War, followed by the service of women in the Navy's Permanent Force with the South African Defence Force (SADF) since 1972, and lastly, after the establishment of the SANDF, their service with the SAN since 1994. While the first and last eras have been well studied, the second has been largely neglected in academic writing. This marked an important milestone in women's service in a permanent capacity, and led to their expanded utilisation in later years. Steyn utilises both archival sources and oral history to offer a balanced view of the experiences, challenges and, particularly, the utilisation of women in the SAN during the early and mid-1970s.



In their article, Magdeline Alcock and Jacqueline Wolvaardt, both from the University of Pretoria, report on the perceived barriers affecting adherence to healthy eating and exercise guidelines among obese active-duty military personnel of the SANDF. They show that, according to the World Health Organization, the accumulation of excessive or disproportionate body fat impairs health, and is defined as overweight and obesity. The South African military community, like the general population, is susceptible to the consequences of overweight and obesity. Alcock and Wolvaardt show that obesity directly influences military recruitment and operational readiness as it affects the physical fitness, overall health, and ability of members to perform their duties optimally. The South African Military Health Services (SAMHS) employs a multidisciplinary approach to treat and prevent obesity and related conditions. The authors show that, identifying perceived barriers to physical activity and healthy eating within the military environment could help to develop effective programmes to address weight management and mitigate the health consequences of obesity.

In his article, Henning van Aswegen, an independent researcher and author, discusses the infamous case of Dieter Felix Gerhardt – the accused and convicted Russian spy. Van Aswegen proposes that Dieter Felix Gerhardt, a naval officer stationed in Simon's Town, South Africa, was a paid agent working for the Russian Military Intelligence Service, *Glavnoje Razvedyvatel'noje Upravlenije* from within the SADF. However, this assertion could not be accepted as true without scientific investigation and analysis through a case study. The author thus approached the case study on Dieter Felix Gerhardt and Ruth Johr from the perspective of intelligence studies, and intelligence terminology and nomenclature are used throughout to make sense thereof.

In the final article, Dhikru Adewale Yagboyaju, from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, analyses corruption as a major threat to Nigeria's internal security. While prior research has explored the various aspects of corruption and its effect on security in Nigeria, Yagboyaju focuses on analysing specific forms of misconduct within the Army and Prison Services – two security agencies under the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, respectively. Although both agencies fall in the military and paramilitary categories, their roles overlap with other security forces, such as the police. The author employs a combination of secondary data sources for the conceptual and theoretical framework, and primary data from event analysis, particularly from public hearings concerning the chosen security agencies in Nigeria. Using a combination of the structural theory and ecological approach as an analytic frame, he reveals that corruption is widespread in multiple sectors of the internal security architecture of Nigeria.

A selection of book reviews by Johnny O'Neil, Alan Nelson, Marno Swart, Godfrey Ramuhala and Phumza Mboobo concludes this issue of *Scientia Militaria*.

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## The Editors

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