

Scientia Militaria

South African Journal of Military Studies

Editorial

In the ever-evolving global security landscape, persistent conflicts and humanitarian crises continue to challenge leadership at every level, whether in roles of governance or in command. As we reach the mid-year mark, the protracted Russo–Ukrainian War, the ongoing Gaza conflict, and escalating security issues across Africa – from the Sahel to the southeastern coast – underscore the complexities of the global security landscape. This editorial, although somewhat unconventional in its approach, reflects on the intricate nature of leadership within these contexts, a theme specifically chosen in recognition of Evert P Kleynhans’s exemplary contribution to *Scientia Militaria* from 2021 to 2024. Building on the threads from the previous editorial (*Scientia Militaria* Vol. 52 No. 2 [2024]) on contemporary wars, conflicts, and security-related matters, this editorial honours Kleynhans by exploring these contemporary affairs through the lens of leadership as a critical determinant in the conduct and consequences of war, security, and peace.

A prime illustration of the role leaders should play and their need to adapt when faced with prolonged conflict and geopolitical uncertainty is the Russo–Ukrainian War, now in its fourth year. The United States (US) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member states have been supporting Ukraine since the February 2022 invasion. Since Donald Trump won the US presidential election in November 2024, and the contentious bilateral meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office three months later, the continuation of Western support has, however, been debated by journalists as well as diplomatic and security experts. Leadership change in the White House, however, has not discouraged Zelenskyy from continuing to seek international support, even paying a visit to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in April 2025. The question is to what extent Ukraine can sustain a war of attrition with Russia, even with continued international support. This includes whether Ukraine can sustain a steady supply of military reinforcements to maintain its military strength due to manpower losses, especially with intensified Russian drone attacks. The situation is exacerbated by the pool of potential recruits – mainly limited to men – for combat service in forward areas due to military views on gender. For instance, by May 2025, Ukraine still had only one female pilot flying combat helicopter missions.¹ Since the conflict erupted, Zelenskyy has emerged as a symbol of adaptive leadership. He might thus decide to challenge the traditional military culture for the sake of the survival of his country.

In the Middle East, the Gaza War between Israel and Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups – triggered by the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel, which prompted a massive military offensive in response – is also continuing, despite the January 2025 pause to facilitate the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. The war has intensified tensions across the region, and created a large-scale humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. From Yemen, Iran-backed Houthi rebels have continued with attacks on international shipping

and missile strikes on Israel, while the United States responded with air strikes in Houthi-controlled areas. Most recently, a young couple working for the Israeli Embassy had been killed outside a Jewish museum in Washington, D.C. by a man shouting, 'free, free Palestine'.² These incidents illustrate that the conflict in Gaza has not escalated on its own; rather, the politics surrounding it have contributed to the continued spread of violence.

On the global stage, the membership status of Palestine as a "non-member observer state" at the United Nations remains unchanged since the United States, a permanent member of the Security Council, vetoed the 12-member majority supporting the Algerian proposed resolution for Palestine to gain full membership status in April of last year.³ In the interim, individual states have offered their own views on the conflict. In March 2025, South Africa issued an official media statement condemning Israel for refusing to allow aid into Gaza, and the ongoing Israeli military operations in the West Bank. Earlier this month, at the Arab League Summit, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, reiterated the need for a two-state solution. Guterres appears to remain steadfast in his resolve to pressure both sides to reconcile their military goals with humanitarian accountability, while Israel plans to reoccupy Gaza. At the same time, Western pressure on Israel is mounting due to the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, with the United Kingdom suspending trade talks with Israel in late May 2025. Ethically inclined leadership styles, such as those of Guterres and his predecessors, often criticised by Security Council members as performative, have rarely contributed to lasting peace. Whether this is an exception, only time will tell.

In Africa, leadership faces regional security challenges. The Sahel remains the most lethal theatre of militant Islamist violence on the continent. More concerning are hostilities shifting southward and westward, with mounting pressure on neighbouring coastal West African states. In comparison, Somalia has seen an increased Turkish presence of personnel and Akinci drones to boost the Security and Sector Development Plan in Somalia. Turkey made this decision, while the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) continues to struggle to get off the ground due to a lack of funds. Further south on the continent, the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has deteriorated quickly since the beginning of this year. By March, the Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) terminated the mandate of its mission to the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC). This decision sparked a variety of accusations from critics.

For South Africa, the decision to withdraw rested on a situation reminiscent of more than a decade ago, when 13 South African National Defence Force (SANDF) troops were killed during the Battle of Bangui in the Central African Republic. As a result, South African civil-military relations came into the limelight, particularly the extent of parliamentary defence oversight and political will to hold Cabinet members and SANDF leaders accountable for what had transpired. The recent death of 14 SANDF soldiers, who formed part of the SAMIDRC deployment fighting the Mouvement du 23 Mars rebels – commonly referred to as M23 – around Goma, triggered a similar situation. The phased withdrawal of SANDF troops and equipment from the region is already underway, with

additional funds allocated for the revised 2025–2026 budget to support the operation, amidst conflicting reports on the progress of the withdrawal. Despite public support for the decision, political opponents have not been silent. In response, the South African Joint Standing Committee on Defence emphasised that the decision to withdraw the military was merely to adopt a more strategic approach, utilising alternative diplomatic avenues to achieve peace and stability in the central African nation. The diplomatic labelling of the SAMIDRC withdrawal from the Democratic Republic of Congo as a “success” inhibits open debate and public accountability regarding the political, strategic, and logistical blunders made in terms of this mission.

Much of these developments have been overshadowed by ongoing diplomatic tensions that have exacerbated over recent months. South African news outlets and media platforms are instead focused on reframing bilateral economic trade relations, increasing investments for mutual benefit, and forging collaboration in technological exchanges between South Africa and the United States. These issues formed the foundation for President Cyril Ramaphosa’s working visit to Washington at the invitation of President Trump in May 2025. Ramaphosa’s measured response demonstrated diplomatic leadership under provocation, which is probably only the first part of a much lengthier narrative in development. Journalists, biographers, academics, and a host of others will observe and study these events and, more significantly, how these leaders responded to the challenges. The result of their actions, as well as inactions – intended and accidental – will determine their legacies and how history will remember them.

Finally, attention is directed inward to the scholarly domain, or more specifically, this journal, to reflect on the stewardship of the most recent editor-in-chief, Evert Kleynhans, after his term had ended in December 2024. Like most former editors, Kleynhans is a member of the Faculty of Military Science (FMS) at Stellenbosch University. What sets him apart from his predecessors is that he completed his studies – both undergraduate and postgraduate – through the faculty, followed by his employment as an early-career academic in the Department of Military History in 2019. His ambitious determination and hard work led to Kleynhans’s promotion to associate professor in a short five-year period from his official entrance into academia.

A year after his appointment in the FMS, he was presented with an opportunity to join the *Scientia Militaria* editorial team which, at the time, consisted of Thomas Mandrup, the editor, and Evert Jordaan, then secretary. From January 2021, with Mandrup’s term ending, Kleynhans transitioned from co-editor to editor. In September, Kleynhans created the new position of book reviews editor. Anri Delpont had the opportunity to be the first to serve in this role. Two years later, in mid-2023, the editorial team underwent further changes as Delpont transitioned to the position of co-editor; Jordaan, to that of book reviews editor; while Jeanne-Pierre Sherman was welcomed as the new secretary.

Under Kleynhans’s leadership, the journal underwent transformative rebranding, expanded its digital presence, and utilised the end-to-end scholarly publishing platform (Open Journal Systems), in addition to ensuring the consistent and timely biannual publication of the journal, in addition to several special issues. These combined efforts have led to the inclusion of *Scientia Militaria* in the prestigious SciELO SA journal collection since

June 2022, following a recommendation by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). The ASSAf report states, ‘[*Scientia Militaria*] is comparable with other leading international journals. It makes an important contribution to the discipline from South Africa and Africa.’⁴ Kleynhans’s final act as editor-in-chief was the appointment of a new editorial advisory board for the 2025–2027 term in keeping with the commitment of the journal to academic excellence, international collaboration, representativity, and multidisciplinary research in security, defence, and military affairs. The composition of the board also reflects extensive depth and experience in research achievements, ensuring a wealth of expertise to guide the future of the journal. At the end of his term, Kleynhans was granted an award for his meritorious service to the journal.

As the incoming editorial team for the 2025–2027 term, we face the daunting task of maintaining and building upon the reputation of *Scientia Militaria* as an academic platform for the expression of excellence and integrity, as established by its previous editors.

In keeping with the leadership theme confirmed in this editorial and reflective of Kleynhans’s area of study, a select number of recent book publications on historical leaders – ranging from former South African Prime Ministers and Presidents to Defence Ministers – are reviewed in this issue. As always, the journal is grateful to our book reviewers, Timothy J Stapleton, Kongko Louis Makau, Bhaso Ndzendze, John Siko, and Anna la Grange, for their time and for sharing their thoughts on these publications. This issue also boasts a broad range of original works from a diverse selection of authors operating in both the military and the academic environment, adding to our understanding of contemporary as well as past military and security affairs.

The first article in this issue was written by Kyle J Bester, a registered research psychologist and senior lecturer in psychology at the University of South Africa. He discusses how the landscape of cyberspace is growing at an incredibly rapid pace, and how it has penetrated deeply into every aspect of society. To address this issue, Bester employed a unique approach, focusing on cyber-hygiene practices among senior South African military officers – a largely understudied subject within the South African armed forces domain. To achieve his research objective, Bester adopted a qualitative method and conducted ten semi-structured interviews. The study was guided by securitisation theory, which emphasises that the military plays a key role in orchestrating a “security move”. The aim of Bester’s study was to explore how military officers in particular conceptualise cyber hygiene, and how cybersecurity behaviour is practised in the context of the SANDF, as an important site where senior military officers undergo educational training.

The article by Bulelani Tsewu, a military law practitioner in the SANDF and graduate from the University of South Africa, discusses how, despite it not being part of the profile of a soldier to bully other soldiers, the nature of the military and its status as a social institution make soldiers vulnerable to the events of bullying. Such vulnerability comes about because of the structural inequalities – especially hierarchical relationships – that characterise military service. It bears emphasising that soldiers operate in a unique and robust environment with a rigid and uncompromising hierarchical rank structure with specified roles and career fields. Soldiers however do not forfeit basic human rights,

and should therefore be protected from treatment that degrades their sense of self-worth. The study on which Tsewu's article reports, examined the possible influence of bullying in the SANDF, while also considering legal remedies available to victims of bullying.

In their article, Asiel E Kubu, retired Vice Admiral, former SANDF Chief of Human Resources, and doctoral graduate, and Strinivasan S Pillay, Head of the Department of Public Management and Economics at Durban University of Technology, discuss the concept of human capital as defined by Groth and Hebb. According to the latter's definition, the effectiveness of an organisation depends on the quality and effectiveness of its employees. In line with the SANDF Human Resource Strategy of 2010, the South African Navy pursued recruitment interventions favouring the appointment of black personnel in order to address inequalities of the past in terms of demographics. This led to fewer white youth being inducted, resulting in a predominantly black South African Navy. To investigate this challenge, Kubu and Pillay adopted a mixed-method research approach (i.e. both qualitative and quantitative). The qualitative research comprised a literature review on human capital, the transformation process in the SANDF, the demographics of the country, and interviews with serving white recruits in the South African Navy. Furthermore, a questionnaire survey (the quantitative research part) targeting white youth was administered in Gauteng, a province in South Africa, to obtain data.

In his article, Jonathan Leach, a private military practitioner and Stellenbosch University graduate, considers the varied and intricate security challenges confronting the international community in an era of hybrid warfare. This modern form of conflict blurs the lines between war and peace, creating legal "grey zones" where traditional military forces struggle to operate effectively. As a result, countries face a troubling gap between their policy goals and the capabilities of their armed forces, compounded by political and legal restrictions that limit aggressive responses. Leach argues that this vulnerability demands a sophisticated, complex, and politically charged strategic response to counter a hybrid threat posture – one that effectively links policy ends to the ways and means of achieving those ends. Leach then proposes a conceptual framework for private military force to counter a hybrid threat posture.

In the article by Hussein Solomon, a senior professor at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, he discusses why Boko Haram remains a relentless threat more than two decades since its emergence in 2002. Despite concerted efforts by Nigeria, neighbouring countries, and the international community, this extremist group continues to sow death, destruction, and displacement across the region, expanding its reach with alarming resilience. Solomon pinpoints three critical oversights behind the failure to curb this menace. First, Boko Haram must be seen as part of a broader regional security complex, not just a Nigerian problem. Second, the Islamist ideology of the group has been underestimated, leading to misinformed policies doomed to fail. Third, an overlooked link between misogyny and extremism has further undermined counter-terrorism efforts. Through this analysis, Solomon offers a provocative rethinking of Boko Haram's enduring power, urging a more nuanced approach to dismantle its grip on the region.

In the final article, Gavin EC Heath, from the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, delves into the history of the Second World War, focusing on the journey of a party of three Allied prisoners of war (two New Zealanders and one South African), who escaped from the Prigione di Guerra (PG) 78/1 camp at Acquafredda near Rocca Morice. In his article, Heath discusses the environmental conditions they faced on their epic journey to British lines near Campobasso. In particular, the bioclimatological factor is discussed, along with other factors, such as river depth, animal presence, and terrain. The literature review Heath employed comprised memoirs by escaped prisoners of war, popular histories, and recent studies by South African scholars. He employed a mixed-methods approach and obtained meteorological data from the Italian Meteorological Service.

Scientia Militaria is proud to offer this diverse array of rigorously researched articles that span contemporary challenges and historical perspectives. The contents are enriched by thoughtful book reviews that look into the lives and legacies of influential historical leaders, weaving together a multifaceted narrative that bridges past and present leadership paradigms. We warmly invite scholars, practitioners, and readers from across the globe to engage with these illuminating works. Your participation – whether through readership, appraisal, or submission – strengthens our collective pursuit of understanding and innovation in military and security scholarship.

The Editors

Anri Delpoit  & Evert Jordaan 

Endnotes

- ¹ M Varenikova, 'How One Woman is Breaking a Military Stereotype in Ukraine', *The New York Times*, 18 May 2025. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/18/world/europe/ukraine-woman-combat-pilot.html>> [Accessed on 21 May 2025].
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- ³ EM Lederer, 'US Vetoes Widely Supported Resolution Backing Full UN Membership for Palestine', *Associated Press*, 19 April 2024. <<https://apnews.com/article/un-vote-palestinian-membership-us-veto-8d8ad60d8576b5ab9e70d2f8bf7e2881>> [Accessed on 19 April 2024].
- ⁴ Academy of Science of South Africa, *Annual Report 2022/2023*, 2023, 59. <https://www.assaf.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ASSAf-Annual-Report_2022-23_Final.pdf> [Accessed on 20 May 2025].