

Beyond Sub-Imperial War, 'Blood Methane', and Climate-Debt Denialism:

South Africa's Pro-Military Lobby Risks Worsening Multiple Injustices in Northern Mozambique

By Patrick Bond | Opinion

Abstract

South Africans really must confront two conjoined crises that affect both the majority here, and the vast majority next door in Mozambique. First, the climate catastrophe's amplification due to rising dependency upon Liquefied Natural Gas (which is more than 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide in coming decades), leaving our neighbour as the world's fourth worst-affected country since 2000, at a time when South Africa is already the third-highest greenhouse gas emitter per person/GDP among major countries. Second, the deplorable trajectory of Pretoria's sub-imperialist adventurism, now represented by the army's deployment in Cabo Delgado province in order to promote gas drilling by multinational corporations. In part because of the corrupt, repressive Maputo government,

many Southern African civil society organisations regularly appeal for an end to both Mozambique's 'blood methane' war and, behind it, the fossil fuel extraction that amplifies the climate crisis. The innovative demand is for Global-North payment of climate reparations to victims of extreme weather, plus financial compensation so as to leave the world's fourth-largest gas field unexploited. Against these arguments and movements, there is a vociferous South African lobby—which can be termed 'laptop bombardiers'—ignoring or brazenly dismissing both crises: climate and the danger of further sub-imperial mishaps. It is long overdue to confront this lobby by objecting to damaging fossil fuels and militarism, and call it to account for the vast ethical lapses in their analyses.

Introduction

On 22 December 2021, 31-year-old Tebogo Radebe's life ended in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. He was a corporal in the SA National Defence Force, and was a tragic casualty—fighting within the regional Southern African Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) deployment—along with a few other soldiers from the region and from the Rwandan army. Also perishing in battles involving SAMIM since mid-2021 have been scores, if not hundreds, of Mozambicans, mainly Islamicist insurgents, but also innocent bystanders caught in the cross-fire. The destruction since late 2017 has included more than 800,000 displaced people and 3,000 fatalities, plus extremely high ratios of infrastructure and crop damage.

There is a sub-imperial context to this battle ground that must be openly acknowledged, partly because all public-intellectual commentary and certainly all scholarship really should include acknowledgements of both the worsening climate catastrophe in the region, and the deplorable power relations between multinational Big Oil corporations (and allied Northern governments), South African elites (including its largest oil company, Sasol), and Mozambique's ruler on the one hand, and people and planet on the other. Yet a group of South African fossil-militarist commentators, overwhelmingly drawn from a certain generation and race group, seem to have no qualms about downplaying either the climate implications of exploiting the world's fourth largest gas field in terms of climate, or the sub-imperial ethics of regional armies intervening to prop up multinational oil companies, as they incessantly drum-beat in favour of war.

University of the Free State political science department chair Theodor Neethling (2021a) is just one of many scholars to promote both Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and military intervention:

'The LNG projects in the northern Cabo Delgado area, with major gas reserves attracting an estimated total investment of more than \$50 billion, represent a silver lining of hope for this impoverished country in terms of major international investment and revenue generation. Observers often assert that this could pave the way for the country to become Africa's Qatar or even Dubai from 2024

onwards... the LNG industry in Mozambique could revolutionise the economy of the country.'

The 'revolution' is in good hands, claims Neethling (2021a):

'At government level, the Mozambican head of state, President Filipe Nyusi, plays a key role in the country's LNG sector. In fact, he was elected 2020 Person of the Year by Africa Oil & Power, the African continent's leading investment platform for the energy sector. This prestigious award is presented to individuals who are considered exceptional and who display true leadership and innovative thinking in the steering of their countries or organisations to the forefront of the global energy sector. Thus, a lack of political commitment to the LNG sector does not seem to be an issue or risk in the development of the LNG sector in Mozambique.'

Who will defend the fossil revolution—and especially the expensive new Cabo Delgado LNG investments by Total, ExxonMobil, ENI, Galp, and China National Petroleum Corporation—and with it, Maputo's gallant revolutionary leader against rising Islamic terror? Though Nyusi and his close allies are, in reality, a corrupt, brutal tyranny (Norbrook, 2021), Neethling is enthused about several armies marching to the rescue: 'On the positive side, an agreement was reached in June 2021 by the leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to deploy forces from the regional organisation in Cabo Delgado to assist the government of Mozambique in its fight against the insurgents.'

Questions arise:

- What assumptions of Neethling's deserve questioning, and what indeed are the roots of this way of thinking and arguing?
- Why would climate dangers to Mozambique's extremely vulnerable coastline, inland infrastructure and agricultural land be completely ignored, when reporting on the world's fourth-largest source field for LNG—made up mainly of

- methane, whose climate-destructive potency via extraction, processing, storage, transport, and combustion is more than 80 times worse than CO₂ (the main cause of the climate catastrophe), in the coming (critical) two decades and 25 times worse over the coming century (Stanford University, 2022)?
- Why is the climate import of this gas identified by Neethling merely as an economic (trade-related) risk, insofar as he correctly notes that Western sanctions on imports from countries relying on high levels of greenhouse-gas-sourced energy are due to begin in 2023—but with no reference to the cyclones, floods, droughts, and other damage that have made Mozambique the world's fourth most adversely affected country from climate change this century (ReliefWeb, 2021)?
- And how, in this analysis, can the SADC leaders' own abundant military abuses—especially by South Africa's troops in the region when protecting other multinational-corporate extractive industries, but also other armies' brutal actions against citizenries in Zimbabwe, Eswatini, and Angola—simply go unremarked upon?

Neethling and others in this tradition are genuinely playing with fire, and their lack of rigour and ethics are yet more glaring—being white, apartheid-era beneficiaries of an extremely carbon-intensive economy whose military's sub-imperialist role included not just repressing local democrats, but defending a crime against humanity. That background really requires an extra level of critical introspection not apparent in their recent commentary.

Sub-Imperial Cheerleaders

An anonymous analyst at the Texas-based political consultancy Stratfor—a firm referred to by Barrons as a 'shadow Central Intelligence Agency' (Laing, 2001) and whose main database was exposed by WikiLeaks in 2012—assessed South Africa's long-term sub-imperialist fusion of economic interests and regional military prowess:

'South Africa's history is driven by the interplay of competition and cohabitation between domestic and foreign interests exploiting the country's mineral resources. Despite being led by a democratically-elect-

ed government, the core imperatives of South Africa remain: maintenance of a liberal regime that permits the free flow of labor and capital to and from the southern Africa region, and maintenance of a superior security capability able to project into south-central Africa.' (Stratfor, 2009)

Over the subsequent dozen years, the war-making capacities of the South African Defence Force (SANDF) deteriorated substantially, even as it was called into service in several African missions. The army's performances in south-central Africa—as well as at home—were open to various forms of criticism, not least that in a democratic society, the merits of sending troops abroad to risk their lives on behalf of opaque but plainly corrupt ruling-party players and multinational corporations should be subject to social debate. In spite of the objectionable—often self-destructive—manner in which SANDF forces were deployed in, most notably, the Central African Republic's capital Bangui in 2012–13 and the mineral-rich eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo for much longer, and in spite of continuities associated with sub-imperialist violence dating well before 1994, the regional-militarist lobby is ascendant.

This is easily observed today by considering Mozambique's 'blood methane' war. (The term recalls the Zimbabwe Defence Force's role in Manicaland's 'blood diamonds' conflict: on behalf of Chinese and Israeli capital and the Mugabe-Mnangagwa regime's generals, hundreds of local working-class troops killed hundreds of desperate artisanal miners in 2008 so as to evict them from the Marange fields they had farmed for generations [Maguwu, 2013].) South Africa's lobby includes a highly-vocal, well-connected militarist intelligentsia, some of whom are consultants to the local Military Industrial Complex—though this conflict of interest is rarely disclosed in public commentary.

Many contemporary security operatives and promoters of sub-imperial extractivism date to apartheid-era service (and indeed many are male with Afrikaner surnames, and served in the military prior to 1994). In their analyses of the 2017–21 Cabo Delgado war theatre, there was only occasional, slight hesitation by sub-imperial-inclined think tanks, journalists, and commentators when making the case for armed intervention. Some were slightly

more reserved, including the International Crisis Group and a few other NGOs which requested both military and humanitarian aid, suggesting the need for more sophisticated relations with the armed forces of ex-colonial (Portuguese and British) plus other imperialist armed forces. Most of the vocal commentariat, though, proved unable to grasp the human costs of war, were uncritical of multinational corporate arrangements with Mozambican elites, exhibited no climate consciousness (either of cause or effect) and were, finally, subtly Islamophobic.

These advocates of militarism were given an opening in mid-2020 when South African foreign minister Naledi Pandor reconfirmed Pretoria's sub-imperial agenda in no uncertain terms. Pandor (2020: 12) testified to her parliament that a 'great opportunity exists for South Africa to import natural gas from Mozambique, thus the security of Cabo Delgado is of great interest to South Africa and her energy diversification strategy. South Africa's security agencies need to enhance their capacity.' Notwithstanding her open call to fuse fossil-capital dependency with military sub-imperialism, that security strengthening wasn't likely to happen under conditions of austerity, as conditions deteriorated over the subsequent seven months. Indeed, SANDF's capacity to purchase equipment and sustain personnel fell much more rapidly as a result of Treasury's 2020–21 budget cuts, as well as a surprise mid-2021 deployment when the army had to police sites of unrest within KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces during a week of rioting, widespread looting, and police incompetence (Africa Commission, 2021).

Nevertheless, the potential that South Africa would benefit from Cabo Delgado gas allowed war-drumming to thump ever more loudly throughout the most influential local media in 2021, periodically amplified by Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe's comments favouring import of Mozambican gas (Omarjee, 2021). The beat emanated most consistently from South Africa's two main metropolitan areas, home to the Pretoria-Midrand-Johannesburg elite-regionalist intelligentsia (foreign policy specialists, scholars, journalists, and researchers), and the Stellenbosch/Saldanha-Cape Town military-strategic zone (with Potchefstroom an important Old School outlier).

This network represents South Africa's version of 'laptop bombardiers.' That phrase emerged to capture the spirit of mid-1990s U.S. intellectuals who advocated carpet-bombing Serbia. It was coined by Simon Jenkins in *The Spectator* but popularised most by Los Angeles Times columnist Alexander Cockburn (1994). The latter witnessed the debate about Yugoslavia's tragic dismembering becoming 'one of the most astonishing displays of high-minded warmongering since the cream of Europe's intelligentsia of the left cheered their respective nations into the carnage of World War I.' The analogy stretches today to the squad of reinvigorated sub-imperialist boosters operating from the main South African geopolitical 'think tanks' (i.e., places where people are paid to think, by the people who control the tanks).

These analysts advance the argument made by Pandor (2020), namely that if South Africa's state managers consider Mozambique's Rovuma Basin gas 'of great interest' for an 'energy diversification strategy,' then the corresponding logic is, 'security agencies need to enhance their capacity.' To that end, the most prolific pro-military commentator in Africa, Jane's Defence Weekly correspondent Helmut Heitman, made a similar nationalistic energy-security case in 2021: it is 'purely selfish self-interest for us to try and stabilise at least our region' with the SANDF intervention he favoured. This was in part because of the insurgency's potential to 'place at risk Cahora Bassa hydroelectric power station. It places at risk the gas fields from which we now draw gas. In fact if you look longer term, we need the gas fields in Cabo Delgado as well, because the gas fields we now use [i.e. Sasol's offshore central Mozambique, at Temane-Pande] are running down' (SA Broadcasting Corporation, 2021).

To illustrate the upgraded security required for transferring gas from Cabo Delgado, the proposed African Renaissance Pipeline to Johannesburg was greeted with enthusiasm in the mid-2010s, although it became a pipe dream once the insurgency began. To avoid shipping, truck and rail traffic when exploiting the Pande gas fields starting in 2004, a 900km pipeline was built, crossing into South Africa at Lebombo-Komatipoort. The route begins at the Temane LNG facility (near Vilanculos) in the middle of Mozambique and ends in Secunda, where gas is squeezed into liquid petroleum at the single highest

greenhouse gas emissions point-source in the world. Could an extension twice as long be built northwards to Palma? Even without civil war prevailing, maintenance of such pipelines is arduous, and as Bloomberg reported in October 2020, on much more secure South African terrain, ‘Transnet Pipelines has had over 80 incidents of fuel theft this financial year that involve tampering with infrastructure,’ mainly to bunker stolen oil (Burkhardt, 2020).

Yet South Africa’s main opposition party militarist, Democratic Alliance Shadow Minister for Defence Kobus Marais, stressed precisely such direct importation (i.e. by pipeline not ship) when speaking to Cape Talk a few days after the Palma attack:

‘South Africa most certainly do have a direct interest in what is happening in Cabo Delgado. There are South African mining companies that is operating officially with all the necessary authority in that area. It is rich in minerals and gemstones and then obviously the whole LNG industry. South Africa has got major investments in terms of construction, providing construction material, maintenance, etc there. Also remember we are already getting LNG from Mozambique to Sasol. And then there is the possibility of getting something like that directly to Gauteng from Cabo Delgado. So we have to become involved.’ (Marais, 2021a)

Moreover, into a vacuum like Mozambique’s war zone, there may wander other self-interested elements from the West whose oil firms are at risk. Hence for Pretoria to not intervene, Marais (2021b) continued, would be ‘unsustainable, unaffordable, and indefensible from a foreign policy perspective. Although the USA, France and Portugal all currently have a presence, it is not ideal for the region not to be part of any stabilisation force.’ In the same spirit, Neethling (2021b) advocated ‘South African military support to stabilise Cabo Delgado and restore law and order in the short term. Wider international support might even be necessary,’ in part because ‘Sasol has invested heavily in gas exploration projects since 2014.’ Francois Vreÿ (2021), Emeritus Professor of Strategy at Stellenbosch University’s Saldanha-based war college, was even more frank about multinational corporate beneficiaries: ‘The impact spilled

offshore as gas companies placed extensive foreign infrastructure development for the energy sector on hold. Rebuilding the confidence needed for the gas industry to resume activities is a major incentive to get the insurgency under control.’

Suave Sub-Imperial Narratives

It is easy to follow the logic of Stratfor’s (2009) vulgar-Marxist argument here, namely that the SANDF has to become involved in the blood methane struggle—ideally in explicit alliance with the West—so as to back up South African capitalists’ investments. If Marx’s simple dictum that the state is essentially the ‘executive committee of the bourgeoisie’ really does apply, then some of these commentators seem entirely comfortable with crude, profiteering self-interest as justification for such blatant sub-imperial intervention. However, there are much more suave ways of selling South African involvement in this conflict, which is where the laptop-bombardier intelligentsia becomes important.

From the same generation (and ethnicity), Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project analyst Jasmine Opperman was hopeful the imperial-sub-imperial combination might actually work: ‘a foreign/regional joined force with a streamlined command and control can shift the momentum away from the insurgents... It is an insurgency that cannot be viewed, and must not be regarded and underplayed, as not only a risk to Mozambique but also the region’ (Essau, 2021). That particular part of the narrative—that the insurgency

“ Yet genuine concern about Islamic-terror contagion is just as easily a narrative to not introduce troops into northern Mozambique, so as not to kick the hornet’s nest and potentially be met with a backlash elsewhere. As Opperman (2021) put it: ‘The problem we are sitting with is the Islamic State threat directed at South Africa if they should get involved in Cabo Delgado, and that threat must be taken seriously. We know we have Islamic State disciple figures on home soil’ (le Roux, 2021). ”

will spread, not just into Tanzania where conditions are supposedly ripe, but perhaps to Johannesburg-Pretoria, to Cape Town and to Durban (where in each there are large Muslim populations)—could be based upon paranoia or justified fear. It could also be a ruse to promote militarism.

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Thus, the second component of the pro-intervention narrative is that if SADC doesn't step in, then the U.S. or other foreign interests will. Opperman referred to the new administration of Joe Biden: 'There are clear foreign agendas at play... This is old wine in an old bottle with a new label... The US is merely going to aggravate the situation' (le Roux, 2021). Would the U.S. military be able to defeat Al-Shabab? To prosecute a bush war against insurgents of this sort will be difficult, as the fighters are apparently able to blend in and out of the dense Cabo Delgado terrain. After more than four years of fighting there were only a few prisoners taken, with no apparent Mozambique army successes in capturing leaders or permanently retaking guerrilla bases, though the main coastal town was wrested back from the militants' control by mid-2021.

Given the Mozambican army's appalling record, a careful but nevertheless militaristic approach was advocated by the International Crisis Group, a network established in 1995 by U.S. and British diplomats which 'aspires to be the preeminent organisation providing independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage deadly conflict.' It was established by Finnish and Australian sub-imperial leaders Martti Ahtisaari and Gareth Evans after both played significant roles in the South African and Namibian elite transitions from apartheid to neoliberal democracy. With access to well-placed (always confidential) imperialist sources of information, its analysts remarked with confidence:

'To tame the insurrection, Maputo needs to use force, with bespoke assistance from outside partners, and to carefully address underlying grievances... Mozambique's Western partners say they want to help but their diplomats say their capitals will be reluctant to supply materiel to the military without the institution going through significant training and reforms... A heavy deployment of regional troops unfamiliar with the local terrain may not be necessary. Instead, Maputo should welcome bespoke African and international assistance to support its own special forces, who are receiving training primarily from a few Western partners. It should task these special forces to spearhead restricted military operations to contain and then degrade Al-Shabab.' (International Crisis Group, 2021)

Indeed, another narrative common to centrist research agencies and NGOs acknowledges that without addressing socio-economic grievances, the necessary military suppression of Al-Shabab will not resolve the local tensions. Diverse sources of regional power and humanitarian aid will be required, according to SA Institute for Security Studies commentators Jakkie Cilliers, Liesl Louw-Vaudran, Timothy Walker, Willem Els, and Martin Ewi (2021). For Opperman: 'We don't have a choice. We cannot let the ISIS or an international terror group direct our foreign policy, but we also have to apply caution here. We cannot simply deploy soldiers. That will not solve the problem' (le Roux, 2021).

Setting pro-intervention advocacy aside, by mid-2021 several genuine dangers associated with further armed incursions into Cabo Delgado were obvious. One was failing to incorporate the disgust that local residents had for the faraway Maputo government, especially the army and also mercenary allies. The latter include Russia's Wagner Group, and South Africa's Dyck Advisory Group and Paramount Group. The two former mercenary companies had committed countless, blatant atrocities (Sauer, 2019; Hanlon, 2021; The Economist, 2020). In turn, a related danger was an inappropriate delegitimization of the insurgents, by underestimating the degree to which socio-economic desperation and anger created genuine roots for their base-building. A third obvious danger was completely

ignoring the role of the climate crisis in exacerbating both the roles of victims (cyclone and drought victims) and villains (Big Oil) in Cabo Delgado.

The pro-intervention analysts themselves are thus guilty (in varying degrees) of denialism, defined as taking three forms by Stanley Cohen (2001): whether literal (e.g. in disputing the local factors, thus assuming that regional and Western troops can solve the problem as it were merely surgical 'degrading' the insurgent enemy); interpretive (e.g. in downplaying the socio-economic and ecological factors); and implicatory (failing to acknowledge the need to leave the fossil fuels unexploited and pay reparations for climate damage). However, the laptop bombardiers were only as serious a problem as there were real forces on the ground to activate the threat. These took the form of mercenaries, the SA army and other countries' troops, most immediately from Rwanda, as well as other SADC countries and potential Western powers, including the former Portuguese colonists. But it is the militarist analysts' faith in the SANDF that merits more attention than they dare give.

South Africa's Sub-Imperial Shame

Recall Stratfor's (2009) view that an 'imperative' of post-apartheid South Africa remained not only 'the free flow of labor and capital' intra-regionally but also, to enforce this, 'a superior security capability able to project into south-central Africa.' The latter role, however, has long given both South African militarists and anti-militarists great cause for concern, in part due to the SANDF's illegitimacy before 1994 and to its uneven competence since. There was no question that under apartheid, superior security capability permitted the SA military to conduct unrivalled regional state-terrorism during the 1970s–80s. That ended, though, with the 1987–88 Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola, during which Cuban air support to the Angolan army was decisive and more than a hundred white soldiers returned to South Africa in body bags.

One immediate result was the realisation that army supply lines were too stretched both logistically and psychologically, and not only did the military struggle that Pretoria had supported since the mid-1970s fail miserably (the guerrilla movement Unita killed a million Angolans, but could not win power).

In between southern Angola and the South African border was Pretoria's colony of South West Africa—whose liberation movement had by 1989 gained enough international support that the SA Defence Force (SADF) was forced to retreat, and the country won its freedom. The SADF's periodic incursions into the region also included state terror attacks against democracy proponents who were civilian members of the African National Congress, in Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. The SADF's role in Mozambique included support for the Renamo right-wing movement which like Unita in Angola, is accused of killing an estimated million civilians with nothing to show for it aside from post-1992 oppositional status.

The apartheid regime's army was also brutal when working inside South Africa—in the Black townships and rural Bantustans alike—but, after the late 1980s, also increasingly ineffectual in repressing the democratic mass movement. In the period from the 1976 Soweto youth rebellion, when soldiers became a constant presence in townships, to early-1990s 'Third Force' activity, the SADF purposively created mayhem in many areas of South Africa. Especially in its collaboration with the South African Police and the Inkatha Zulu-nationalist movement, tens of thousands of deaths of Black activists (and a few whites) were attributed to state terror, including 14,000 from 1990–94 alone (Stott, 2002: 36).

The post-apartheid era witnessed six major engagements by the SANDF, which are worth briefly revisiting to assess whether by far the largest military force in the region is capable of carrying out a long-term pacification of the Cabo Delgado insurgency: Lesotho in 1998; Burundi in 2001–09; Sudan since 2004; the Central African Republic in 2013; the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2013; and internal deployment of troops within South Africa both to fight Western Cape gangs and impose Covid-19 lockdown regulations.

- In Lesotho, a September 1998 SANDF counter-coup mission initially to the Katse Dam wall—which was meant to halt threatened (but highly unlikely) destruction of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (supplying Gauteng Province) by mutinying Lesotho Defence Force soldiers—led to the deaths of over 50 of the latter alongside nine SANDF troops (out of 600 deployed) and 40

civilians (Ka'Nkosi, 1998). The series of fights was described by South African political scientist Philip Frankel (2000) as a 'debacle' that fulfilled 'some of the worst predictions of brutality, ill-discipline and poor leadership' in the new democratic army (though Neethling [1999] defended it).

- The Burundi mission was successful within the narrow terms of a 2001–09 mandate—in which 750 SANDF troops were deployed to help the local army halt a 1993–2005 civil war, and specifically to protect 150 formerly exiled Hutu politicians—but it was not a lasting peace. Shortly after SANDF left, dissatisfaction over the 2010 and 2015 elections led to an attempted coup and widespread civil society protest that continues into the 2020s.
- In Sudan, SANDF's deployment—through the UN-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur—left hundreds of troops vulnerable in mid-2015 to an (alleged) near-hostage situation. This was due to Sudanese soldiers' anger at their leader Omar Al-Bashir's potential arrest while visiting Johannesburg for an African Union conference, although that was resolved thanks to Al-Bashir's escape before the court-ordered arrest was implemented. He skipped out of South Africa surreptitiously—with president Jacob Zuma's open condonation—after an arrest warrant was issued thanks to a local legal NGO's desire to see the International Criminal Court's mandate followed, which in turn led Zuma to begin withdrawal from the ICC. On the one hand, Sudanese peace activists considered SANDF's troop withdrawal in 2016 to be dangerously premature but on the other, as Heitman remarked, 'the mission has been largely futile as a result of its forces being matched if not overmatched by the weaponry available to the various militias' (Fabricius, 2016). A small residual team was left behind, but in 2019 it suffered the temporary loss of two of their vehicles in a hijacking, although they were returned, albeit at the expense of some local fatalities (Martin, 2019).
- In the Central African Republic capital Bangui, in March 2013, the deployment of 220 SANDF troops was even more chaotic than in Lesotho, because both Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Zuma had agreed to defend the dictator Francois Bozizé following a 2006 deal for diamond market monopoly control and other commercial opportunities shared with the African National Congress' investment arm Chancellor House (AmaBhungane, 2013). But 15 SANDF fatalities resulted when Bozizé was overthrown by the rebel Séléka movement that month, leaving bitter troops to tell Sunday Times reporters: 'Our men were deployed to various parts of the city, protecting belongings of South Africans. They were the first to be attacked... outside the different buildings – the ones which belong to businesses in Jo'burg' (Hosken and Mahlangu, 2013).
- In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2013 (shortly after the Battle of Bangui), Zuma renewed SANDF's 1,300-strong role in the UN peace-keeping mission – including deployment at Bunia, within 50km of a Lake Albert oil concession worth \$10 billion that his nephew Khulubuse Zuma very dubiously acquired in 2010 from DRC president Joseph Kabila Jr. This continual redeployment has occurred notwithstanding allegations of South African troops' abuse of local residents, and indeed further scandals soon followed including drunken (and sexual) rampages, and one case in which SANDF troops ignored a 2016 massacre by warlords just a kilometre from their base (Allison, 2016). Along with other grievances, this led to intense youth protests against the UN mission in 2021, at least one of which resulted in civilian fatalities.
- Finally, the internal South African deployments of SANDF troops began in 2019 in Mitchells Plain and other Cape Town working-class townships in order to subdue gang war, and by April 2020 were amplified into enforcement of one of the world's most stringent economic lockdowns. Nearly 80,000 troops (including reserve forces) served at peak from May–September, leading to continual controversies over abuse. The main newspaper in Johannesburg editorialised: 'Many stories of brutality by SANDF members are doing the rounds among communities and on social media. The military had been found to be enforcing the Covid-19 lockdown at the expense of undermining human rights, personal dignity and common sense. A solution is needed, urgently, to deal with the mindset of the men and women in the military' (The Star, 2021). Then in mid-July 2021, the SANDF was suddenly called into service to quell rioting in two provinces, which led to more than 330 deaths and \$5 billion in damages over four days. These were not the usual South African service delivery

protests, which in some periods of dissent occur thousands of times annually, nor instances of progressive advocacy pressure by unions or social movements. They were chaotic revolts, with no logic aside from consumerist looting, although the initial spark had a Zulu-ethnicist flavour in support of jailed former president Zuma. The SANDF deployment began with an initial 2,500 troops but these had so little visible presence in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, Pretoria or two dozen other sites of rioting. The force was suddenly boosted to 25,000. This left reduced capacity to send the scheduled 1,500 troops to Mozambique at an anticipated cost of nearly \$70 million. However, an advance SANDF team did deploy to Cabo Delgado on schedule in late July 2021.

In many such settings, SANDF troops appeared not only unwelcome but also unprepared, as several otherwise pro-intervention commentators (not just Heitman) grudgingly acknowledged. And this, then, brings home the ultimate logic of pro-war advocacy: restoring SANDF budgets.

Conclusion: SANDF-Restoration Rhetoric or Climate-Reparations Responsibilities

The pro-war commentariat will not succeed because material conditions do not favour a successful sub-imperial outcome. These conditions are not likely to change, because the regular ridicule SANDF has received for incompetence was, to some extent, because of persistent post-apartheid budget cuts, and these will worsen in the 2020s due to extreme neoliberal fiscal pressures greater than the sub-imperial counter-pressures. SANDF's operational problems were exacerbated in 2021 by the Treasury's renewed austerity drive, in the wake of a substantial budget deficit opening up due to the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 (GDP was 6.4 percent lower than in 2019 and tax revenues had dropped even more). In April 2021, following a \$1.04 billion budget cut over three years, defence minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula (2021) complained to parliament: 'Our defence capabilities are under extreme stress. Our ability to equip and train our force appropriately has become progressively more difficult. The current threat manifestations require more boots on the ground, which is contrary to the imposed funding ceiling on personnel.'

According to Heitman:

'the army bluntly doesn't have enough infantry to handle the Mozambique deployment plus the one in the Congo plus the border. We don't have the air lift to move troops around quickly. We don't have enough Rooivalk attack helicopters. We don't have the naval assets to really secure the Mozambique Channel as well as our own waters... We haven't been spending money to maintain our frigates. We haven't like given them refits. They're starting to have problems. Things are starting to break. There aren't enough spares. I think only one of the three submarines is operational at the moment.' (SA Broadcasting Corporation, 2021)

As for SADC's SAMIM force, Heitman predicted it would be 'laughably too small to do the job' with 'no real reconnaissance capability, no tactical mobility. It's actually a joke in poor taste' (SA Broadcasting Corporation, 2021). After the first six months of deployment, Heitman reconfirmed that SAMIM was 'faffing around,' not 'achieving anything,' because it remained 'ludicrously weak and under-armed with criminally inadequate air support' (Hanlon, 2022). Heitman's agenda has always been to beef up military spending (he is a defence industry consultant, having served in the SA military during apartheid). So, the critique above might be taken as akin to a boy crying 'Wolf!' with respect to SANDF's capacity to mobilise roughly 1,500 troops, of whom only a few hundred were hunting the Islamic terrorists at any given time.

Still, the critique of SANDF's incapacity does correspond to what, since 2019, has been a popular trope: army troops were given the derogatory nickname-meme 'Mabena,' after a soldier whose commanding officer called him out (in what became a viral clip) for being 'tall and lazy for nothing' (TimesLive, 2019). Pretoria's head of international intelligence, Robert McBride, amplified the bumbling-fighter impression in 2021 when four of his undercover security operatives from Pretoria were captured by Mozambican counterparts, and when confronted with the information by a journalist, he 'responded to City Press' query with two laughing emojis' (Stone, 2021). The following week, McBride was suspended because of the humiliation Ramaphosa and State Security Minister Ayanda

Dlodlo felt when meeting Nyusi and requesting him to release the South African spies, in the course of thorny negotiations then underway over SADC troop deployments (Felix, 2021). However, it later transpired that Dlodlo had approved the spies' mission in writing during the Palma attack in late March, reinforcing Pretoria's Keystone Cops image (Masondo, 2021).

Perhaps reflecting such weaknesses, SAMIM was kept away from the two areas with gas infrastructure (Palma and Mocimboa da Praia) from mid-2021 into 2022. Joe Hanlon (2022) observed that SANDF-led regional fighters 'failed to quell the insurgents. And both Lesotho and South Africa are having financial problems and may not be able to continue to pay for troops and supplies.'

But all of this requires us to consider some uncomfortable conclusions. Neethling (2021a) provides one approach in *The Thinker*: 'All in all, the problems in Mozambique primarily relate to what Matsinhe and Valoi describe as 'four decades of half-mast sovereignty' in Mozambique, which is evident from the fact that, since the country's independence in 1975, the central government in Maputo has lacked a monopoly over the means of violence in its territory and its long coastline.' But when Neethling and fellow laptop bombardiers advocate more violence—with the Mozambique state better backed by sub-imperial and imperial military forces—so as to solve the blood methane war, they are fantasising.

In contrast, there is a distinctly different narrative for progressive intellectuals to grapple with, which

“ The pro-war commentariat will not succeed because material conditions do not favour a successful sub-imperial outcome. These conditions are not likely to change, because the regular ridicule SANDF has received for incompetence was, to some extent, because of persistent post-apartheid budget cuts, and these will worsen in the 2020s due to extreme neoliberal fiscal pressures greater than the sub-imperial counter-pressures. ”

concerns the way Global North economies (including roughly the wealthiest 5% of South Africans) have overconsumed fossil fuels and run up a vast 'climate debt' in the process. One result is that in spite of so-far negligible contributions to the catastrophe (i.e. trivial per capita greenhouse gas emissions), Mozambique was from 2000–19 the world's fourth-most climate-damaged country (behind only Puerto Rico, Myanmar, and Haiti) (ReliefWeb, 2021). The unprecedented cyclones, floods and droughts, especially in 2019, were compensated only tokenistically by foreign aid.

The case for the North—including commentators in the Pretoria-Midrand-Joburg-Potch-Stellenbosch-Saldanha-Cape Town foreign policy intelligentsia—to face up to their/our climate liabilities, simply cannot be disputed. (Unless, that is, we are climate denialists in the Donald Trump tradition, or hit-and-run-style climate-debt denialists who refuse 'polluter pays' responsibilities.) This is especially obvious in relation to the 2019 cyclones that were most damaging to Mozambique (Mikulewicz and Jafry, 2019). Frequent-flying academics and researchers have been especially frightened of admitting that climate damage should be part of our conferencing and lifestyle calculations. If 'build back better'—following the 2020–21 Covid-19 travel and in-person meetings pause—is to mean anything, then it would be logical to begin identifying how to repay Mozambicans for the vast damage, and also encourage to no further harm. One route is compensating that society for not extracting the Cabo Delgado gas, and insisting on rapid demobilisation of SAMIM and SANDF and the earliest possible exit by Big Oil.

It may sound outlandish to leave such vast fossil resources unexploited, but even the South African government acknowledged this logic in mid-2021 when its Nationally Determined Contribution offer demanded: 'The just transition in South Africa will require international cooperation and support... by the international climate and development and finance community for non-fossil-fuel development in Mpumalanga...' (Republic of South Africa, 2021: 28). Of course, to expect the Pretoria government to act consistently with such rhetoric, given its worsening methane addiction and sub-imperial proclivities, would be naïve. Instead, civil society advocates and scholars must continue to arise from within civil society with three interrelated demands: to stop

the war, to leave fossil fuels unexploited, and to use compensatory funds to pay poor people in Northern Mozambique (as an alternative to them picking up arms with Islamic guerrillas).

Most recently, political-ecologist scholar-activists Anabela Lemos (2022), Boaventura Monjane (2021), Teresa Cunha and Isabel Casimiro (2021), and Samantha Hargreaves and Lemos (2021) have made these arguments, as have many within the Alternativa progressive activist network, the União Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC) peasant movements, the Friends of the Earth affiliate JA! (host of the "Say No to Gas!" international campaign) and the Centre for Living Earth's Territórios em Conflicto. Here in South Africa, solidarity activist groups which in 2021 commented along the same lines include the International Labour Rights Information Group and South African Federation of Trade Unions. In Harare, the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development were similarly in solidarity. Regional networks committed to leaving fossil fuels under the Mozambique Channel and solidarity payments to compensate, include Women in Mining, the Rural Women's Assembly and the Southern African People's Solidarity Network. In Lisbon, solidarity protests were organised by Climaximo, 2degrees activism, and the youth movement's Greve Climática Estudantil. In London, Friends of the Earth UK offered support (Bond, 2022).

Linking these groups to South Africans who can expand their struggles against LNG exploration in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans is now critical. Rising anti-gas sentiments in 2021–22 were sufficient to block South Africa's two main offshore seismic-blasting explorations (by Shell, Total and local ally Johnny Copelyn). In those cases, like Mozambique, the South African state's objective has been to ensure foreign corporations—especially those from Johannesburg operating regionally—could engage in extractivist profiteering, in the process impoverishing local residents through displacement, pollution, and depletion of non-renewable resources. As refugees from such conflict spill back into South Africa (such as Congolese immigrants since the early 2000s), working-class xenophobia surges. There is little or no South African comprehension of the terror felt by those fleeing from such resource wars.

Perhaps it is unfair and incorrect to paint all the laptop bombardiers mentioned in this article with the same brush, including accusations about their self-destructive climate denialism, their desires for militarist alliance-making between Pretoria and the vicious, corrupt Maputo regime, their apparent nostalgia for cross-border war-making, and—for many, not all—their absurd faith in a declining sub-imperial army that they believe simply needs more funding. Perhaps these scholars will start considering the realities discussed here and not avoid them—and perhaps even take a progressive not utterly reactionary point of view. If not, if they stay the course, the pro-military lobbyists court the risk of extreme self-harm in Mozambique, and further harm to our own society and our species' potential for survival, too.

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