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The militarization of anti-poaching: Undermining long term goals?

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1 **The militarization of anti-poaching: Undermining long term goals?**

2 Running header: The militarization of anti-poaching

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20

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22 **Introduction**

23 The illegal wildlife trade has become increasingly sophisticated and poaching of wildlife,
24 including elephants and rhinoceros, is rising (Burn et al. 2011; Biggs et al. 2013; Wittemyer et al.
25 2014) . The London Declaration, signed in February 2014 by 46 countries, calls for four basic
26 actions to tackle the problem: eradicating markets for illegal wildlife products; ensuring effective
27 legal frameworks and deterrents; strengthening law enforcement; and promoting sustainable
28 livelihoods and development. It backs these with a £10 million fund from the UK Government.
29 The Declaration proposes a broad palette of action, but that breadth is threatened by growing
30 calls for stronger armed responses to poaching from a wide range of conservation NGOs
31 (including leading international organisations) and national governments (including the US
32 Government, Duffy, forthcoming 2015; White, 2014). We argue that these calls could be
33 counter-productive because they are founded on limited knowledge about poverty and poaching,
34 inadequately address rising wealth in user markets (Ayling, 2013; Roe et al, 2014), make
35 oversimplified claims that trafficking is funding terrorism (White, 2014), and do not adequately
36 consider demand reduction strategies.

37

38 **The shifting drivers of poaching**

39 Poaching is changing because of changing patterns of wealth in demand countries, the dynamics
40 of poverty in supply countries and the interplay between them. In debates about the relationships
41 between poverty, poaching and conservation, there is an underlying assumption that the poor
42 poach to raise their income in situations where they have limited alternatives (Roe 2008).
43 Poaching cannot be understood merely as a response to material deprivation. It is also driven by
44 prestige, identity and custom (MacDonald 2004). Attempts to combat poaching through

45 livelihood enhancement that do not engage with these realities will founder (Alexander and
46 McGregor 2000). If we say that poverty drives poaching, we must recognise too that poverty is
47 multi-dimensional, encompassing lack of power, prestige, voice, and an inability to shape one's
48 future (Sen 1999; Hulme, 2010).

49
50 Recent increases in poaching are more closely related to increases in wealth in demand countries,
51 rather than poverty in supply countries. Recent reports from CITES and TRAFFIC-ASIA suggest
52 that new drivers of the illegal wildlife trade are part of a shift from traditional culture-related
53 consumption to new forms of conspicuous consumption driven by rising incomes. In the 1980s
54 and 1990s key markets for rhino horn were Taiwan, Yemen, and to a lesser extent, China. Rhino
55 horn was primarily used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as a cardio-tonic and blood
56 thinner (rather like aspirin in Western medicine) and as *jambiyya* dagger handles in Yemen (a
57 marker of status). The market for horn in Yemen has reduced because of economic decline there,
58 and following a national ban Taiwan is no longer significant (Ayling, 2013; Milliken and Shaw,
59 2012). Now, the rising markets are in Vietnam and China: as wealth increases a greater number
60 of people can afford to purchase products that contain rhino horn. However, this only provides
61 part of the explanation. Certainly in Vietnam, increased demand is also linked to new patterns of
62 consumption and groups of consumers. Prior to 2006 use of rhino horn in Vietnam was limited.
63 However, demand increased following the comments of a prominent politician who thought it
64 alleviated his cancer (Rademeyer, 2013: 275). The price of rhino horn in Vietnam in 2013 was
65 US\$65,000 per kilogram, and sometimes US\$ 75,000 (Ayling, 2013: 60). Rhino horn also began
66 to be used as a form of conspicuous consumption as a 'party drink' that did not result in a
67 hangover and was thought to fortify male strength. Although never originally an aphrodisiac

68 (which was a Western myth), that myth has now gone full circle and Vietnamese consumers now
69 refer to it in these terms (Rademeyer, 2013: 274-276). In late 2014 the Humane Society
70 International claimed that consumption of rhino horn had reduced by 33% partly as a result of
71 their campaigns, however this was based on a small study and Vietnam remains the biggest
72 market for rhino horn (Humane Society International, 2014). Clearly then, the demand in
73 Vietnam blends rising incomes, historical health practices, emerging cultural norms, conspicuous
74 consumption as well as state level corruption (Litchfield 2013; Milliken and Shaw, 2012; Ayling,
75 2013).

76

77 **Anti-poaching as a global security initiative**

78 Appropriate policy responses to these threats may be impeded by the ways that poaching is
79 linked to issues of global security. A good example is the link drawn between poaching and Al
80 Shabaab which can be traced back to a single investigation by the Elephant Action League
81 (Kalron & Crosta 2012; also see White, 2014). Posted on their website in 2012, their report was
82 only picked up by international media after the attacks on Nairobi's Westgate Mall in 2013.
83 Since then, claims linking Al Shabaab to wildlife trafficking have been made in diverse fora
84 including testimonial to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (US Senate Committee
85 on Foreign Relations 2012), the UK's Chatham House (Lawson & Vines 2014), meetings of the
86 International Conservation Caucus Foundation (Barron 2013) and media reports (Doshi 2014).
87 More broadly Hilary Clinton (US Secretary of State, 2009-2013) and Barack Obama (US
88 President, 2009-present) have made public statements drawing links between wildlife trafficking,
89 poaching and global security (Goldenberg 2013; The White House 2013). The idea that ivory
90 poaching funds terrorism thus circulates in high political circles, but it does so on a paucity of

91 clear evidence and using simplifications of a complex political economy of poaching. Somali
92 groups have long been identified as a possible source of ivory poaching in Kenya, while at the
93 same time poaching activities have also been linked to corruption within the Kenyan
94 Government itself (Leakey & Morell 2002).

95
96 These simplifications matter because where militias and insurgent groups are involved in ivory
97 poaching, it is only part of a wider military strategy – and hence so must counter-poaching
98 strategies. Poaching has been used as a financial underpinning for conflicts across Sub-Saharan
99 Africa, including Uganda in the 1970s and 1980s, Angola and Mozambique in the 1980s, the
100 Great Lakes region since 1996, and the Central African Republic and its neighbours more
101 recently (Humphreys and Smith, 2011; Ellis, 1994). Solutions to poaching must engage with
102 issues of broader regional stability and the wider political context (Milburn, 2012; Lunstrum,
103 2014).

104
105 There are also serious ethical concerns. More forceful actions against poaching can lead to
106 injustices (Neumann 2004) - an important omission in Challender and MacMillan's (2014)
107 review of poaching and policy responses, which does not focus on how more aggressive
108 approaches to enforcement are made possible by policy debates. Shoot-to-kill policies are legal
109 in some states (e.g. Botswana and Uganda), contrary to the principles of the Conservation
110 Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR) to which many in the conservation community aspire (IIED,
111 2015).

112

113

114 **Undermining long term goals**

115 Strong and forceful approaches to conservation can work (Brockington 2002). Specifically, there
116 is evidence that greater levels of patrolling reduced poaching in the Serengeti (Hilborn et al.
117 2006). However, the same authors are clear that their analyses do not provide evidence that
118 better armed rangers, or greater use of force, would be more effective. Instead, militarized
119 approaches can escalate conflict between rangers and poachers, and lead to the alienation of local
120 communities.

121
122 Arresting more poachers does not always stop criminal syndicates. In South Africa rhino
123 poaching continued to rise despite increased arrests (Standley & Emslie 2013; Milliken and
124 Shaw 2012; Rademeyer, 2012). Where poaching is the consequence of organized criminal
125 networks and global commodity chains, tackling just one end of the chain will have limited
126 impact (Duffy et al. 2013; Rademeyer, 2012). We need to be cognizant of the fact that the illegal
127 wildlife trade is not a singular phenomenon that requires a one-size-fits-all strategy to tackle it.
128 Illegal hunting and wildlife trading play a central role in the subsistence strategies of many
129 communities around the world (Roe et al, 2014). The strategies for tackling subsistence hunting
130 need to be quite different to those for commercial scale poaching of high value products. Other
131 approaches seek to reduce demand in end-user markets (Zain, 2012) as an effective strategy.
132 There are arguments in favour of formal legalisation and monitoring of wildlife trades (e.g. of
133 rhino horn, Biggs et al, 2013) but these do not adequately address important considerations of the
134 relative roles of wealth, poverty and inequality. Clearly, different trades might require very
135 different policy responses according to species, place of origin, trade and transit route and profile
136 of demand.

137

138 **Conclusion**

139 The breadth of the London Declaration is welcome. A key issue is what sort of impact it makes
140 on policy and practice, based on what sort of understandings of the problem. Important measures
141 of success will include the long-term solutions that it fosters, and the extent to which it tackles
142 poaching within the broader political, social and economic context of which it is part. Efforts to
143 reduce poaching need to engage with the broader political economy of the wildlife trade –
144 notably how wealth (rather than poverty) drives demand and structures markets and trade.
145 Reducing demand from consumers needs a complex combination of carefully designed
146 awareness campaigns, leadership from involved actors, as well as systems of incentives and
147 penalties. On previous experience this will require commitments over several decades from all
148 stakeholders, not just more enforcement in supply countries.

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