



RENE DESCARTES, FRENCH PHILOSOPHER (1596-1650).

One cannot conceive anything so strange and so implausible that it has not already been said by one philosopher or another.

INSIGHT

Nigeria: is 100 years enough?

GWYNNE DYER

THE reason they convened a National Conference to discuss Nigeria's future last week is that it's the 100th anniversary of the unification of the northern and southern protectorates into one nation. Well, one colony, actually, since the whole place would remain under British rule for another half-century. And the one subject the delegates are banned from discussing is whether unification was really such a good idea.

It was an excellent idea from the viewpoint of the British colonial administrators. Not only was it tidier, but it crippled resistance to British rule. When you force 500 different ethnic groups into a single political entity, they will spend more time fighting one another than the foreigners.

A century later, the country is still riven by ethnic and religious divisions that distort both its politics and its economy. Nigeria is one of the world's biggest oil producers, but two-thirds of its 170 million people live on less than \$2 (about R21) a day and even the big cities only get electricity four hours a day. It ranks 144th on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which means in practice that most public funds are stolen.

In the mainly Muslim north, an extremist Islamic insurgency by a group called Boko Haram killed more than 1 300 people in the first two months of this year. Or rather, they and the brutal and incompetent army units who respond to their attacks with indiscriminate violence together accounted for 1 300 lives.

And when Lamido Sanusi, the internationally respected head of Nigeria's central bank, accused the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) of failing to repatriate \$20 billion of the \$67 billion received for oil sales between January 2012 and July 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan suspended him for "financial recklessness and misconduct".

"Failing to repatriate" actually means that the money stayed abroad and disappeared into the foreign bank accounts of powerful Nigerians. This is normal — it has been estimated that two-thirds of the \$600 billion that Nigeria has earned in the past 50 years from selling its oil was lost to corruption by the political and business elite. What was unusual was for a member of the elite to challenge the practice openly.

Sanusi, who was named central bank governor of the year in 2010 by *Banker* magazine, was promptly accused of links to Boko Haram in a document circulated to Nigerian websites that was traced back to President Jonathan's social media adviser. It was a typical establishment response and it was total nonsense. But a depressing number of southern Nigerians will believe almost anything about Sanusi, simply because he is a northern Muslim.

He is actually a member of the northern aristocracy — his grandfather was the emir of Kano — and an Islamic scholar who condemns Wahhabist fundamentalism. He is one of Nigeria's foremost advocates of a tolerant, inclusive Islam.

"Even a cursory student of Islamic history knows that all the trappings of gender inequality present in the Muslim society have socioeconomic and cultural, as opposed to religious, roots," he said recently.

Yet the mistrust between Muslims and Christians, northerners and southerners, is so great that Sanusi's whistle-blowing is seen by many southerners as a political operation aimed at the Christian president. They believe this, even though they also know that the money really was stolen by people at the NNPC, and that Goodluck Jonathan is protecting them because some of it was going to be used to finance his re-election campaign next year.

And why does Jonathan need so much money? To buy the support of the northern power-brokers, who will then deliver the votes to keep him in the presidency. Then he will be able to go on protecting his friends. It's a closed system and it's making Sanusi more radical by the moment.

Recently he told the *Guardian*. "If the population as a whole starts protesting what is going on in our country, how many of them can they kill?" He added that the ousted leaders of Ukraine and the Arab spring nations "never did half as much damage to their countries as our rulers have".

But Sanusi is unlikely to bring the system down. That is why, at the National Conference on Nigeria's future that meets in Abuja over the next three months, some people will certainly defy the ban and start talking about re-dividing Nigeria between north and south. They will mostly be southerners, who resent the large amounts of oil income that the federal government transfers to the northern states that desperately need the money.

Northerners will resist the idea of partition because they would be left running a country only slightly better off than Mali. (Despite the transfers of oil revenue, 72% of the population in the North lives in poverty; in the south, only 27% does.) And in the end, nothing will happen, because cutting off the North would spoil the game.

Nigeria is unquestionably the most dysfunctional large country in the world, but it will hang together because all the elites benefit from the dysfunction, which allows them to steal massive amounts with complete impunity. Indeed, you might say that Nigeria survives because it is dysfunctional.

Gwynne Dyer is an independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

# The aerial guerrilla game

RICHARD COMPTON reports on the tireless conservation work done by the four dedicated soldiers of Project Rhino KwaZulu-Natal's aerial Zap Wing unit

FIDGETING, tinkering with aircraft, discussing new flight paths, poring over maps — and waiting. Perhaps it was the informal setting but there were hints of similarity with the classic Battle of Britain pilots of 1940; tense and fatigued youngsters, waiting expectantly on grassy aprons for the equivalent of a "Scramble" alarm.

With no radar, this rhino poaching war is an aerial guerrilla game conducted by four dedicated soldiers of Project Rhino KwaZulu-Natal's aerial Zap Wing unit. Their task is interpreting often flimsy, very imprecise information and finding needles in the vast Zululand bushveld.

A bit of reliable intelligence had come through. Armed poachers were about to infiltrate Mkhuze Game Reserve.

Etienne Gerber, principal pilot for Zap Wing, had received the call and he lit up. It was the third tip-off the pilots had received in two days. Good intelligence is everything — and gold dust, such is its rarity. Should they fly? When and where exactly in Mkhuze?

It was nearing month end and budgets were stretched. They had long since used up what money was available for February, but the airwaves were full of chatter. Poaching syndicates were on the move — from Tembe and Swaziland in the north to iSimangaliso Wetland Park in the south.

If the comparison with our World War 2 pilots seems overly extravagant, then the tension, bravery and sense of duty allows for the analogy.

Zap Wing co-ordinator Lawrence Munro, section ranger Dirk Swart, Gerber and Wayne Cornhill are nothing if not consumed with tackling these rhino poachers. Talk to them and you find their occupation is a calling — to save every rhino that inhabits the vast 500 000-hectare northern KwaZulu-Natal map that they try to cover on behalf of private owners, as well as state reserves.

Daily flights to root out and uncover poachers are dangerous and exhausting. To start with, two of the men double up as section rangers on the ground for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, commanding anti-poaching units and controlling field-management issues. And the added intensity comes from not only piloting these craft, but simultaneously staring intently out of their craft for hours on end for any sign of incursion on the ground.

Whether it is the tiny, two-seater Bathawk or Cheetah fixed-wings or the two Robinson R44 helicopters that make up the fleet, these pilots have to fly very low, which is risky in itself, with no room to manoeuvre with an engine cut-out.

They fly slowly, too, skirting trees, swivelling, twisting and turning over dense bushveld. They know their enemy is hidden and well-armed — automatic rifles, heavy calibre bolt actions, and the like. Even if the poacher only has a rifle, they are vulnerable, sitting ducks if one of them decides to lift his aim skywards.

Of course, this is their passion. But what saps their spirits and torments them most is watching the budget sheet. They wouldn't talk about how



Ezemvelo's Zap Wing pilots are (from left) Etienne Gerber, Wayne Cornhill, Dirk Swart and Lawrence Munro. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

► **LAWRENCE MUNRO** Member of Ezemvelo's Zap Wing

*"If you think we manipulate the controls of our planes and choppers skilfully, watch us balancing our spreadsheets. Manipulating our monthly flight times and costs has become an art form. We fly extra time one day, knowing we will be grounded for another. That's how it goes here. I know this small fleet of craft represent the greatest support to the anti-poaching teams and collectively make for the greatest deterrence for poachers. But the areas we try to cover are vast and people from all over are relying on us more and more."*

long they can afford to fly daily, but sponsorship funding is tight.

"If you think we manipulate the controls of our planes and choppers skilfully, watch us balancing our spreadsheets. Manipulating our monthly flight times and costs has become an art form. We

fly extra time one day, knowing we will be grounded for another. That's how it goes here," said Munro.

This frustration of having their wings clipped by fuel shortages irks them. "I know this small fleet of craft represent the greatest support to the anti-

poaching teams and collectively make for the greatest deterrence for poachers. But the areas we try to cover are vast and people from all over are relying on us more and more. Look at the map. Despite the generosity of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife [the major sponsor with

R4 million] and the public, we frankly don't have the funding to offer the service we really need to."

This is a war. Landing at iMfolozi, Gerber smiled wearily. He had responded to the Mkhuze call-out and had flown for four hours, trying to find the poach-

ers that intelligence said were "somewhere".

"We knew they were there and we gave over far more fuel than was allowed. But I couldn't find a thing. I had to return, but I would have flown six hours if you had asked me to."

Cruelly, the very next day the poachers emerged and killed a female black rhino. "This enrages us. If we only had the budget we would have flown the next day — and caught them."

But despair is not in their vocabulary. Growing support for their efforts is emerging. With rhino poaching escalating, the SAPS recently made rhino poaching a priority crime, and thereby put it on the same footing as other transnational crimes, such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, and the like. The SAPS's provincial commissioner recently endorsed the creation of a SAPS Rhino Priority Crimes Committee and the establishment of a SAPS Rhino Joint Operations Committee (Rhino Jocom).

Within this, Zap Wing was earmarked as an official support service for the Jocom, serving as an aerial platform for special forces trooping, surveillance and vehicle tracking.

The unit is now coming into its own. Praise is being heard in many quarters, especially the private rhino conservation sector titled the "Zululand Wildlife Security Initiative". People are noting their mounting successes in chasing suspicious vehicles and armed poachers, as well as becoming a major source of discovery of rhino carcasses.

Their perseverance is raising eyebrows. Last year, these four pilots clocked up about 900 hours flying time and accompanied 500 patrols with state and private conservation law enforcement officials. But it was left to Dave Gilroy, community conservation manager for the Somkhanda Reserve, to put a voice to this admiration.

"Utterly invaluable. This is one of the great success stories of this rhino-poaching war in KZN. And these guys don't just seek out poachers. They have become an immense and tireless force in the management of rhino reserves. In a single hour, for example, they replace heaven knows how many people on the ground. They inform all private owners on critical issues such as fencing, break-in points, the status of water holes and even join management on the ground in doing land transects," he said.

As a community conservation reserve, Somkhanda has experienced considerable management challenges. Gilroy, speaking on behalf of the Wildlands Conservation Trust that is currently managing it, gave an example of this assistance.

"One day I got a call from Etienne. He knew about our challenges and offered one of his precious flying hours to fly me over the reserve to do a patrol. We hadn't had the resources for such an oversight for some time and his help was like manna from heaven. In the space of this single hour he was even able to relay the number of rhinos he saw and their locations. He didn't know it then, but he had spotted the lot. It was such a thrill and took so much pressure of us."

## School lunches — a gourmet meal in a plastic box

AFTER having spent the night recently, my brother was lurking around the kitchen the next morning while my husband and I were putting together our children's lunch boxes. He watched in silence for a while, before commenting: "Whatever happened to peanut butter and syrup sandwiches and an apple?" I looked up from the task at hand, which was lovingly slicing mango into bite-sized pieces and depositing it into a suitably sized plastic container, and asked what he meant. According to my brother, our children's lunch boxes are a gourmet meal in plastic box. Disagreeing, I reminded him that our children have a long school day and so need decent food to sustain them until 5 pm.

"Okay," he said, picking up my daughter's bright-purple lunch box and proceeded to unpack its contents, accompanied by a running commentary. "Let's see what we have here. One times drinking yogurt with a straw, one container of chopped-up mango, a hot dog with requisite tomato sauce, an apple (oh good), some strawberries deleafed and

sliced in half, one chocolate milk, a vanilla muffin topped with icing and sprinkles in a very sweet muffin-shaped container, a container of cooked cocktail sausages with a tiny little container of tomato sauce, and a ziplock packet of biltong. Not forgetting two juices, one of which is frozen." He raised his eyebrows as he surveyed the feast spread over the kitchen counter.

"Listen here," I spluttered. "I don't think that their lunch boxes are any different from other children's lunch boxes and, anyway, you just wait until your children are as old as mine — I'd like to see their lunch boxes then."

He nodded, wordlessly picked up his cup of coffee, tucked *The Witness* under his arm and left me to repack my daughter's lunch box, muttering under my

breath that he should bloody well mind his own business.

Now, not having seen other children's lunch boxes, I'm in no position to say whether my children's are any better or worse. What I do know is that they are the bane of my life, they cost a lot and they take a lot of preparation and time. It's especially irritating when most of the thoughtfully prepared food comes home uneaten and swimming in juice at the bottom of the box. We do occasionally toy with the idea of making

**We do occasionally toy with the idea of making our children put together their own lunch boxes, but this quickly gets mooted as I would not be able to cope with the chaos that would most certainly ensue.**

our children put together their own lunch boxes, but this quickly gets mooted as I would not be able to cope with the chaos that would most certainly ensue. It's just easier if I do it myself —

you know, then it gets done the right way.

It's quite odd, actually, this intricate lunch-box routine we go through every morning. You could not describe us as a family of foodies. Don't get me wrong, we enjoy a delicious meal as much as the next person, especially if we haven't had to cook it, but most of the time, we don't really care what we eat as long as food fulfils its purpose of appeasing hunger. If the children are away, my husband and I are quite happy to have cheese on toast for supper, always accompanied by a glass of whatever wine is chilling in the fridge. Cooking is seen as a necessary chore rather than an enjoyable activity, we are not addicted to the cooking channel, have never watched *Masterchef*, and never page through recipe books for fun.

Thankfully, we've passed this casual attitude on to our children, which means they have a very healthy relationship with food. They eat when they are hungry, any time of day, we don't make them finish their food and we don't make them eat if they don't want to.

Generally, I only cook supper, the rest of the day they have to feed themselves, and if they don't like what's on offer, well tough. We also don't behave like food police. While there is always healthy food available, if there's Coke or chocolate in the fridge or a box of biscuits in the grocery cupboard, they can have as much as they want, and if my son doesn't eat vegetables for five days, that's his problem. Because of this, they will, more often than not, choose the healthy option and very seldom will eat all the biscuits or drink all the Coke — you always want something you can't have. I don't constantly check that they've eaten something and while I'm aware of them, I don't obsess about MSG or Tartrazine or added sugar or salt. I mean really, what would a braai be without a bowl of bright-orange NikNaks? It could be luck or genetics

but my children are rarely ill, are not overweight, are energetic and active, sleep well and have no allergies or fillings in their teeth. I like to think it's because their bodies are exposed to everything in moderation.

My brother, who will be looking after my children for a while, says that when he's in charge, they will be organising their own lunch boxes. Well, good luck with that — I fear the prince and princess of the realm may lodge some objections.



MARY CONTRARY