



Joint EPON and Tfp Study

The Effectiveness of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)

.....

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Joint EPON and TfP Study: The Effectiveness of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)

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Acronyms

AOR	Area of Responsibility
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AS	Al-Shabaab
ASF	African Standby Force
ASWJ	Ahlu al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah
AU	African Union
AUPSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
CIMOC	Civil-Military Operations Centre
COIN	Counter-Insurgency Operations
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
CT	Counterterrorism
DAG	Dyck Advisory Group
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EACRF	East African Community Response Force
ERM	Early Recovery Mechanism
EPF	European Peace Facility

EPON	Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network
EU	European Union
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FADM	Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (Mozambique Defence Armed Forces)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Liberation Front of Mozambique)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTI	Global Terrorism Index
HOM	Head of Mission
HDI	Human Development Index
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IS	Islamic State
ISCAP	Islamic State Central Africa Province
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
LNG	Liquid Natural Gas
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PCVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PMSC	Private Military and Security Company
PRM	Polícia da República de Moçambique (Police of the Republic of Mozambique)
PSO	Peace Support Operations
RCTC	Regional Counterterrorism Centre
RDF	Rwandan Defence Force
REC	Regional Economic Community

RENAMO	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambican National Resistance)
REWC	Regional Early-Warning Centre
RM	Regional Mechanisms
RPCD	Cabo Delgado Recovery Plan
SAAF	South African Air Force
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAMIDRC	SADC Mission in DRC
SAMIM	SADC Mission in Mozambique
SAN	South African Navy
SIPO	Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ
SOF	Special Operations Force
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VE	Violent Extremism
VUCA	Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity
WHAM	Winning Hearts and Minds
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Executive summary

Since October 2017, Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado has been plagued by a violent insurgency led by Ahlu al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah (ASWJ). Since the onset of violent conflict, approximately 5 000 deaths, widespread kidnappings, and over half a million people were internally displaced by the start of 2024, alongside significant destruction of property. By early 2021, the deteriorating security situation, exacerbated by the fall of Mocímboa da Praia town and the attack on the strategically important town of Palma, forced the reluctant Mozambican government to yield to regional and international pressure, allowing for external military intervention. Regional actors feared that the insurgency, linked to the Islamic State (IS), could establish a permanent foothold in the region, destabilising Southern Africa. Experiences from Syria and Iraq underscored the risks of leaving IS unopposed, especially the long-term threat posed by an emerging caliphate capable of metastasising and undermining regional stability. In response, on 23 June 2021, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) approved the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) deployment to support the Mozambican government in combating the insurgency.¹ SAMIM was launched in July 2021 under Scenario 6 of the African Standby Force (ASF) doctrine, allowing for robust military intervention against armed opposition.

In August 2022, the mission's mandate transitioned to Scenario 5 of the ASF doctrine, focusing on a multidimensional peace support operation involving civilian, police, and military components. This shift signalled, at least in principle, a move from a predominantly military approach to a broader mission aimed at supporting the Mozambican government and local stakeholders

¹ SADC, "SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in Brief", 10 November 2021, <https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-mission-mozambique-samim-brief>

in stabilising the region. The transition from Scenario 6 to 5 did not imply an end to offensive operations but introduced non-military stabilisation tools to complement the robust military posture. Politically, the transition was framed as evidence of progress, creating space to focus on reconstruction, early recovery and capacity-building efforts. However, the continued presence and high activity levels of ASWJ drew widespread criticism of the decision. While the criticism was valid, the transition was also an attempt to shift from active conflict toward creating conditions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home and allow early recovery activities.

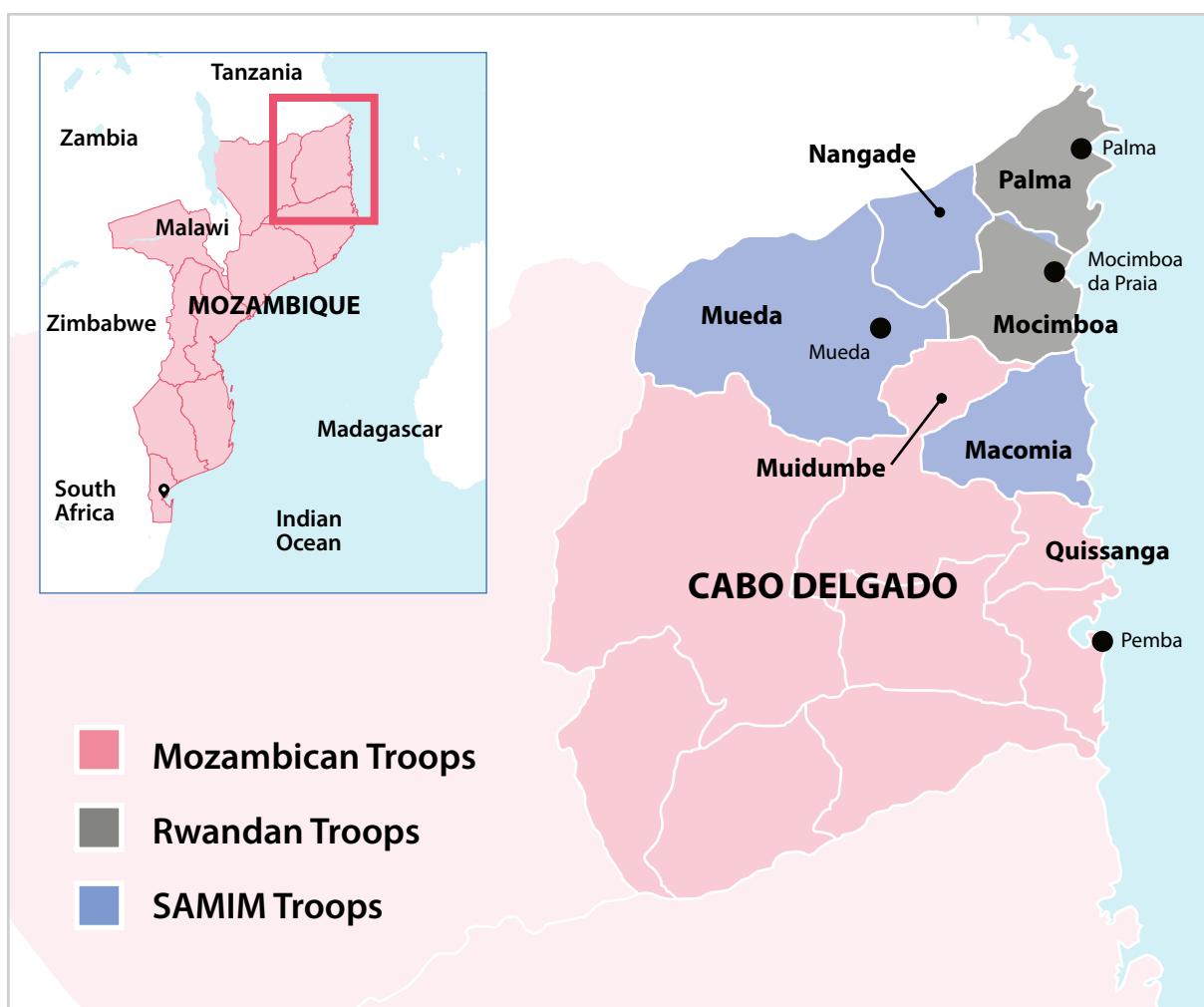
The study investigates the mandate of SAMIM, why it was deployed, which tools it was given to implement the mandate, and to what extent it fulfilled its mandate. The mission suffered from a discrepancy between the mandated tasks and strategic objectives and the deployed capabilities, which meant that the mission found it challenging to fulfil its mandate. The lack of host-nation capacity and political will to cooperate and coordinate with the mission hampered its effect on the ground and contributed to its closure and withdrawal in mid-2024. The study shows that the mission successfully implemented the mission mandate, focusing on assisting the Mozambican security forces in diminishing the ASWJ insurgency's capacity and reestablishing a formal government presence in Cabo Delgado. However, SAMIM did not defeat the ASWJ insurgency, and the mission did not succeed in providing effective air, logistical and maritime support for Mozambique or in establishing and conducting training and capacity building of the Mozambican security forces. The mission only partially managed to provide conditions for effective humanitarian relief and early recovery efforts. Nevertheless, the study also shows that while some of the shortcomings of SAMIM have to do with the significant discrepancies between the mandate and the tools given to the mission by SADC Member States, many of the problems faced were due to the political and practical issues that arose in working with a host-nation having multiple agendas and, at times, a lack of cooperation from the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) also deployed in the area. The lack of collaboration and host-nation political support are two of the key explanations for SADC members' decision to close the mission in mid-2024, although the situation on the ground did not support a complete withdrawal at the time.

Lessons identified

- Host nation cooperation and support must be secured. A key element to successfully deploying and implementing a mandate is close coordination with the host nation and other international actors, which was not always the case in Mozambique.
- A close correlation should exist between the mission's mandate and objectives and the deployed forces' capacity and capabilities. A lack of resources and capacity hampered SAMIM. SADC Member States also did not follow the military recommendations before the deployment or adjust the mandate to fit the tools deployed as part of SAMIM.

- The mission should be agile and adaptable to the actual context and environment. SADC should have a political and military mission advisory board that monitors the mandate's implementation and recommends adjustments to the mission objectives and operational configuration. One of the problems SAMIM faced was that it was a special forces-dominated operation, and for operational security reasons, it was working in a cloud of secrecy, which at times made it difficult to conduct proper progress assessments.
- SADC needs to strengthen the political and civilian dimensions of the mission. The principle of the primacy of policy should be kept in mind. Military efforts and tools need to be integrated into an agile and comprehensive, well-coordinated approach that is not a standalone pillar, as was partly the case with SAMIM. The military tool can create space for political solutions to be found. To address the complex security context, a tailored, well-coordinated and adaptive approach is required.

Deployment map as of April 2022: IIS



1. Introduction

Since October 2017, Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado has experienced an insurgency from a violent extremist group known as Ahlu al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah (ASWJ). The insurgency has led to an estimated 5 000 being killed, widespread kidnappings, more than half a million people being internally displaced by January 2024, and widespread destruction of property.² At the same time, the Cabo Delgado region is home to one of the African continent's largest energy investment projects, an offshore liquid natural gas (LNG) project, with over US\$60 billion invested by three energy consortia. These projects have been suspended for periods due to worsening security challenges, with significant negative economic impact for the companies and especially for the Mozambican state. The energy project was presented and described as a way to expand and transform the Mozambican economy into a growth miracle. A "new Kuwait" or "new Dubai" are the terms used locally. The LNG project located in the northern part of the country is headed by French-based Total Energies and has been suspended due to the security situation in Cabo Delgado, while the two more southern production sites started production in 2022.³

The economic benefits to the Mozambican economy could potentially have a tremendous positive influence and should constitute a real incentive for the government to manage and solve the conflict. However, the Mozambican government has shown itself unwilling or incapable of resolving the conflict, which can be considered unusual. The Maputo government and its

2 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Cabo Delgado, Nampula & Niassa Humanitarian Snapshot", OCHA Snapshot, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/mozambique-cabo-delgado-nampula-niassa-humanitarian-snapshot-june-2022-enpt>

3 Gulf Oil and Gas, "Coral Sul FLNG Achieves 5 Million Tons of LNG Production from Offshore Mozambique", 23 August 2024, <https://www.gulfoilandgas.com/webpro1/main/mainnews.asp?id=1021603>

security forces long argued that the nascent insurgency and subsequent increase in attacks were simple acts of criminality. They responded insufficiently and allowed the security situation to get out of hand. By early 2021, the security situation deteriorated to such an extent that a reluctant Mozambican government had to give in to regional and international pressure and allow a regional military intervention. The region feared that the insurgency linked to the Islamic State (IS) would gain a more permanent presence from which it could destabilise other regions of Southern Africa. Even though the insurgency in Cabo Delgado had its locally based origins and causes, the experiences from Syria and Iraq evidence the risks of the IS establishing a caliphate in areas under its dominance if left unopposed and of regional insecurity metastasising.

Consequently, on 23 June 2021, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) approved the deployment of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) to assist the Government of Mozambique in tackling the insurgency. The mission was deployed in July 2021. The mandate was initially framed under Scenario 6 of the African Standby Force (ASF) doctrine, providing for a robust military intervention anticipated to face armed opposition.⁴ The mission posture was adapted a year later, in August 2022, to Scenario 5 of the ASF doctrine, allowing a multidimensional (civilian, police and military) peace support operation. This transition indicates, in principle, that the focus shifted from primarily a robust military stabilisation⁵ operation aimed at countering the insurgency to an operation that was now focused on assisting the Government of Mozambique and local stakeholders in maintaining stability and creating space for a quick-impact project in the region.⁶ Increased focus was placed on early recovery efforts and softer stabilisation measures in general. When questioned about the situation in a press briefing, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Chief Joint Ops, Lt. Gen. Simphiwe Sandweni, argued that “it is more appropriate to speak of transition” than to use “the term de-escalation”. He further stated:

Six was meant as interventionist by small elements for a very limited time in order to degrade the terrorist threat [...]. Transitioning to Five gives effect to peace support and requires a larger effort and more feet on the ground.⁷

Lt. Gen. Sandweni argued that the transition did not indicate a stop to offensive operations but signalled that a wider range of non-kinetic tools was introduced to supplement the robust

4 AU, “African Union (AU) Guideline on the Role of the African Standby Force (ASF) in Humanitarian Action and Natural Disaster Support”, 2015.

5 It is important to note that “stabilisation” is a highly political term with many different meanings from mission to mission. In this report, the term is applied according to the UK Army doctrine, which refers to the use of tools, both kinetic and non-kinetic, as part of the combined efforts during the first phase of an intervention. For further reading on the doctrinal definitions of stabilisation, see David Vestenskov, “Stabiliseringskoncept”, in Troels B. Henningsen and David Vestenskov, *Militære Stabiliseringsindsatser*, Odense: SDU Press, 2025; Thomas Mandrup, “Stabilisation missions in Africa – a policy battleground or real doctrinal differences?” forthcoming.

6 SADC, “Experts agree that foreign intervention will help Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado to curb insurgency”, 11 November 2021, <https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/experts-agree-foreign-intervention-will-help-mozambiques-cabo-delgado-curb-insurgency>

7 Sam Basch, “SANDF Gives an Update on Mozambique Deployment”, DefenceWeb, 2022, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/sandf-gives-an-update-on-mozambique-deployment>

posture. At the time, there was a political need to signal that progress had been made and that it was possible to transition into a new and less kinetic-dominated phase, with a focus on early recovery, reconstruction and capacity building. ASWJ's continued presence and high levels of activity meant that the decision was widely criticised and out of sync with the evolving realities and complexities of the situation on the ground. Even though the critique was valid, the transition should also be understood as an attempt to move the effort from a war situation to one where it was possible for the IDPs to return home and where it was possible to focus on addressing humanitarian needs conceptually. The underlying logic was that the military forces cannot win and address the political causes of the conflict, but they can create space for non-kinetic efforts to get underway. In early recovery and stabilisation efforts, time is of the essence, and slow responses often lead to fighting and instability resurfacing. As a general rule, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) works with a timeline of a maximum of two years to implement programmes, within which tangible results should have been achieved.⁸

The mandate of SAMIM expired in June 2024, and the mission has been replaced by a temporary bilateral South African force, combined with an increased Rwandan military presence – the latter partly financed by the European Peace Facility (EPF). This funding is complemented by €89 million in support for the training of the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (FADM), facilitated by the EU Training Mission (EUTM).⁹ The Rwandan contingent arrived in mid-2021 and was part of a controversial bilateral agreement between the Mozambican government and Rwanda, which SADC criticised. The agreement also received criticism internally in Mozambique because it lacked proper parliamentary oversight and was pushed through by then-President Filipe Nyusi.¹⁰

SADC members omitted the AU PSOD in the planning and designing of the SAMIM operation but sought endorsement and logistical support after the deployment. According to the SAMIM Head of Mission (HOM), Prof. Mpho Molomo, the Mission was created in terms of the SADC Mutual Defence Pact and deployed at the invitation of the Mozambican government to help it uphold national sovereignty and territorial integrity. SADC only briefed the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) on SAMIM's deployment during a meeting on 31 January 2022 in which the Council endorsed the deployment within the ASF Policy Framework. The AUPSC extended the mission's mandate post facto at the January 2022 Extraordinary SADC Summit. This situation forms part of an ongoing debate about the future roles of the AU as the originally intended continental security manager and then the regional

8 Basil Massey, "Interview", 5 December 2024.

9 EU, "European Peace Facility: Council tops up support to the deployment of the Rwanda Defence Force to fight terrorism in Cabo Delgado", 19 November 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/11/18/european-peace-facility-council-tops-up-support-to-the-deployment-of-the-rwanda-defence-force-to-fight-terrorism-in-cabo-delgado>

10 Borges Nhamirre, "Mozambicans Divided over Rwandan Deployment", ISS Today, 2021, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mozambicans-divided-over-rwandan-deployment>

organisations and mechanisms on the continent.¹¹ Within the AU, there is also ongoing debate over how shifts and challenges should be handled regarding the trend towards moving the responsibility for continental security management and mandating from the AU level to the regional and even national level. At the time of writing, SADC seems to be the only one among the five designated regions of Africa with somewhat regional capacity. In contrast, the capacity in the West, Central and North is severely weakened and, in the East, it is not being used. Some Member States opt to use ad-hoc structures, like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin, Accra Initiative in West Africa, and East African Community Response Force (EACRF). The SAMIM case and the failure of the SADC force in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2025 are important elements in the debate on the future design and roles of the AU, regional entities, and individual Member States in African-led and African-owned peace missions.

As mentioned above, the AUPSC only endorsed the SAMIM deployment more than six months after it deployed, but then pledged to support the mission with equipment and supplies similar to the AU support for the MNJTF. These donations were officially handed over to SAMIM in November 2023.¹² It is important to stress that SAMIM was not mandated by the AUPSC but was authorised, which means that the AU allowed the operation to take place with no direct involvement in designing or executing the mission.

SAMIM, therefore, falls in line with a string of deployments in Africa, where the AU only plays an authorising and not mandating role, which means that AU Member States are withdrawing responsibility for the operations away from the AU and closer to the sub-regional or even national level.¹³ Regional political, defence and security cooperation is guided by SADC and its Member States' respect for certain policy principles enshrined primarily in the SADC Treaty, Protocol, Mutual Defence Pact and strategic plans. These largely self-explanatory principles include national sovereignty and the sovereign equality of Member States; territorial integrity; political independence; good neighbourliness; non-aggression; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; the peaceful settlement of disputes; the right to intervene in a Member State; interdependence; solidarity, peace and security; human rights, democracy and the rule of law; equity, balance and mutual benefit; development and peace; and subsidiarity between the AU and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs).

However, when the AU was formed in 2002, it was decided that the existing regional bodies needed to adjust their policies regarding the AU and that the AUPSC and AU Summit were

11 Thomas Mandrup, "A Changing Security Architecture: An Analysis of the African Standby Concept and the Increased Use of Ad-Hoc Coalitions", in *The Future of War in Africa*, ed. H. Solomon and E. Barlow, 2023; John Karlsrud, "How Ad Hoc Coalitions Deinstitutionalize International Institutions", *International Affairs*, 100(2): 771–90, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae009>

12 AU, "African Union Hands Over Military Equipment to SADC's SAMIM in Mozambique", 17 November 2023, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20231117/african-union-hands-over-military-equipment-sadcs-samim-mozambique>

13 Mandrup, "A Changing Security Architecture"; Karlsrud, "How Ad Hoc Coalitions Deinstitutionalize International Institutions"; Anonymous 10, "Interview", AU, 2022.

the supreme continental organs. Therefore, the AU is the continental authority that mandates the regional entities to undertake actions, as part of a subsidiarity principle. The regional bodies have contested this distribution of roles and responsibilities since the inception of the AU, and this has never really been solved. The establishment of SAMIM and later, the SADC Mission in DRC (SAMiDRC), illustrates this power struggle. A related and relevant question for this report is why SAMIM did not have the same level of success as the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) in countering the ASWJ. Furthermore, why was the Troika+ presented with the assessment that the attempt to reduce the ASWJ had been a success when it had only, at best, partly achieved its objectives? Why did the FADM and Mozambique, as a host nation, only reluctantly work with SAMIM in the latter's attempt to implement its mandate, which, in essence, consisted of assisting the Mozambican government in defeating the ASWJ and providing security for the local population in Cabo Delgado?

1.1. Methodological considerations

Drawing on the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) methodological framework for assessing the effectiveness of peace operations, this study asks to what degree SAMIM was effective in fulfilling its mandated tasks. The project uses a framework developed by EPON, a network of over 40 research partners from across the globe. The framework allows an assessment of the impact of a peace operation based on its ability to: (a) prevent armed conflict and sexual violence; (b) build confidence among local parties; (c) stabilise the area; (d) protect civilians; (e) strengthen public safety; (f) promote human rights; (g) contribute to peace dividends; (h) extend state authority; (i) support institution-building and development; (j) reform the security sector; (k) promote the rule of law; and (l) support community policing and transitional justice. Some of these elements are irrelevant to SAMIM since they fall outside the mission's mandate, which was a robust military operation with very limited civilian elements. Furthermore, the mission was only deployed for a short period, making it difficult to assess the long-term peace dividend. Security sector reform (SSR) and support for community policing and transitional justice were not part of the mandate. At the same time, training of the local security forces never materialised because the Mozambicans were unable to identify the training needs.

The EPON research team interviewed officials of international organisations, local civil society, and local and international researchers specialising in violent extremism between 2022 and 2024. Interviews were conducted online and in person in Mozambique, Maputo, and Pemba, where the headquarters of SAMIM were located, as well as in South Africa. The data collected includes unstructured background and semi-structured interviews with specialists, government officials, the diplomatic community, military experts and practitioners, civil society and religious leaders. Data generated from the fieldwork was complemented and validated by information obtained through desk research. The project was carried out over a three-year period.

The report is organised into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides an overview of the context and conflict. The third section introduces the SADC mandate and composition, while the fourth section assesses SAMIM's capabilities and performance of its mandate. The conclusion highlights the study's findings and provides recommendations.¹⁴

14 Using the EPON framework, the effectiveness of SAMIM can be analysed regarding the following explanatory factors: political primacy, realistic mandates and matching resources, a peoplecentred approach, legitimacy and credibility, coordination and coherence, the promotion of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and climate-related conflict amplifiers.

2. The context – the security situation and causes of the conflict

.....

Since October 2017, Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado has experienced an insurgency from a violent extremist group known by several names, including ASWJ, Ansar al-Sunnah, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – Mozambique, and al-Shabaab (AS) (though it has no direct connection to al-Shabaab in East Africa).

The conflict is a “wicked problem” characterised by high volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).¹⁵ The consequence is that linear thinking and traditional strategic approaches fail to produce sustainable and effective answers to the VUCA that characterises the conflict. SAMIM is no exception since the mission assessment report, the guiding mandating documents, and the concept of operations (CONOPS) document were drawn up based on this linear thinking, creating the first challenges for the mission. The role of the Mozambican security forces, the factional battles within the governing Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), and the criminal networks did not form part of this planning but became an important factor in the daily operations.¹⁶ The mission was further challenged by changes in the operational pattern of the adversary, which meant that the fighting was pushed further south. The conflict in Cabo Delgado consisted of a complex mix of interconnected social, economic, political, security, religious and historical drivers that created the context in which the insurgency in northern Mozambique emerged. More recent triggers have included the exploitation of natural resources like rubies and natural gas, environmental degradation and disasters, and related expropriation of land and uprooting of local communities. Together with a

15 Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning”, *Sciences*, 4(2): 155–169, 1973; Nancy C. Roberts, *No Design Strategy: Challenges in Wicked Problem Territory*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023.

16 Global Organized Crime Index, “Criminality in Mozambique”, 2023, https://ocindex.net/country/mozambique?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Anonymous 16, “Interview”, 14 August 2023; Anonymous 15, “Interview”, 23 August 2023.

legacy of poor services and non-existent presence and support from the state in the area of governance, these issues have exacerbated longstanding grievances about marginalisation, neglect and the exclusion of the communities and identity groups on the periphery of the Mozambican state and society.¹⁷ Cabo Delgado also played a central and key role in the war of independence against Portugal and later in the Mozambican civil war. The political networks and the local militias playing a central part in the current conflict fall within a longer historical tradition of organised armed resistance in Cabo Delgado. The historic ethnic, religious, and political nexus of contention in the region has played directly into the contemporary conflict patterns and predates the 2017 start of the ASWJ insurgency.¹⁸

The insurgency created significant insecurity and displacement and contributed to an ongoing humanitarian crisis. The ASWJ has terrorised the local communities in Cabo Delgado with beheadings, mutilation, torture, mass abductions and rape. The insurgents are estimated to have killed more than 5 000 people since 2017.¹⁹ As of January 2024, over half a million people were still displaced, a reduction compared to the height of the insurgency in mid-2021, when more than 850 000 people were internally displaced.²⁰ The insurgency also caused considerable damage to property and other infrastructure and disrupted the already limited public services, particularly education and healthcare.²¹

In 2019, an official link was formed between the IS and the Islamic insurgency in Cabo Delgado. Subsequently, this link was used as a propaganda tool in other African branches of IS. Being an affiliate of the IS has provided the Cabo Delgado militants with tactical and strategic benefits, including additional equipment and assistance with recruiting and training.²² The insurgency also seems to fund itself through links with organised crime, including human and drug

17 David M. Matsinhe and Estacio Valoi, *The Genesis of Insurgency in Northern Mozambique*, ISS Southern Africa Report 27, 2019; Ênio V. F. Chingotwane et al., *Strategic Options for Managing Violent Extremism in Southern Africa: The Case of Mozambique*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Situation Report, October 2021; Eric Morier-Genoud, “The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique: origins, nature and beginning”, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14(3): 396–412, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2020.1789271>; Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa, “Mozambique’s Forever Wars: Can the Military Affairs Commission, Christian Council, and Islamic Council Be Key Players in Building a National Peace Architecture?” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, 27 May 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2022.2075279>; Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, “National and regional responses to the Cabo Delgado crisis: Failures and opportunities for change”, Policy Brief no. 34, July 2021, <https://www.ijr.org.za/home/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/IJR-Policy-Brief-Cabo-Delgado-09July-2021.pdf>; Jakkie Cilliers et al., “What Would It Take to Stabilise Cabo Delgado?” ISS Today, 27 May 2021, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-would-it-take-to-stabilise-cabo-delgado>; Martin Ewi et al., *Violent extremism in Mozambique: drivers and links to transnational organised crime*, ISS Southern Africa Report 51, August 2022, https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/sar-51_2.pdf

18 Eric Morier-Genoud, “The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique”.

19 Amnesty International, “‘What I Saw is Death’: War Crimes in Mozambique’s Forgotten Cape”, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr41/3545/2021/en>; ACLED, Zitamar News, and Mediafax, “Cabo Ligado Weekly, 27 June–3 July”, 2022, <https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Cabo-Ligado-104.pdf>; Human Rights Watch, “Mozambique: Events of 2020”, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/worldreport/2021/country-chapters/mozambique>; OCHA, “Cabo Delgado, Nampula & Niassa”; UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), “Nearly 1 million people have fled five years of northern Mozambique violence”, 4 October 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/10/633be4474/nearly-1-million-people-fled-five-years-northern-mozambique-violence.html>

20 UNHCR, “Displaced people in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado plead for peace”, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/stories/displaced-people-mozambique-s-cabo-delgado-plead-peace>

21 Eric Morier-Genoud, “The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique”.

22 Ibid; “Anonymous 16, Interview; Anonymous 18, Interview.

trafficking. The insurgents have allegedly abducted many women and have been implicated in trafficking ivory, rubies, and wood.²³

One informant with many years of on-the-ground operational experience in the province stated:

Anyone who claims to understand the nature of the conflict does not understand anything. The conflict is complex and multifaceted, and simple explanations cannot be used to understand what is happening. It is not a civil war since it is far too organised, and it is not a radical Islamist war, as was seen in Iraq or Syria, since the modus and the brutality used do not match what was seen and used by the IS forces in those conflicts. Something more sinister is going on.²⁴

With this in mind, the following section will attempt to unveil some of these layers and unmask some sinister causes of the current conflict.

2.1. Religion and radicalisation

It is no secret and it is well described in the literature that religious radicalisation took place in sections of the local communities in Cabo Delgado from as early as the 1990s. By 2014, the non-violent Islamic sect, the ASWJ, had gained significant support in Macomia and Mocímboa da Praia.²⁵ In 2017, the ASWJ, experiencing suppression and pressure from the central government, turned into a nascent violent insurgency.²⁶ The movement wrote itself into a worldwide Salafist trend that followed the Soviet-era engagement in Afghanistan. Salafism, apart from its religious connotations, should also be seen as an anti-establishment tool, fighting what was often described as corrupt and oppressive governments.²⁷ In the case of Mozambique, the marginalisation and suppression from the central government and the elites in Cabo Delgado helped garner support for ASWJ as an anti-establishment tool of protest.²⁸

One informant suggested that the ASWJ leader, Sheikh Abu Yasir Hassan, travelled to various mosques to win over the local elders and get them to support the struggle against the Maputo

23 US Department of State, “2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mozambique”, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report>; UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “UNODC and Mozambique’s Criminal Justice Officials Present Findings on the Nexus between Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime”, UNODC, 2022, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/latest-news/2022_unodc-and-mozambiques-criminal-justice-officials-present-findings-on-the-nexus-between-terrorism-and-transnational-organized-crime.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Global Organized Crime Index, “Criminality in Mozambique”.

24 Thomas Heyen-Dubé and Richard Rands, “Evolving Doctrine and Modus Operandi: Violent Extremism in Cabo Delgado”, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 33(3): 437–466, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1936956>; Anonymous 15, “Interview”.

25 Heyen-Dubé and Rands, “Evolving Doctrine”, p. 441.

26 Morier-Genoud, “The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique”.

27 Heyen-Dubé and Rands, “Evolving Doctrine”, p. 443.

28 Morier-Genoud, “The jihadi insurgency in Mozambique”.

government, especially its local representatives.²⁹ Initially, there was a locally driven conflict that mobilised people based on their general frustration with being marginalised and feeling used by the “fat cats” in Maputo. The religious motivation also developed into an efficient tool for mobilisation. However, as an informant argued, this change and indoctrination are increasingly part of the ASWJ approach, and only limited focus has been placed on anti-radicalisation instruments directed against demobilised insurgents who have left and decided to return to their local communities.³⁰ As one informant argued, these returnees might be sleeper cells planted in the local communities, waiting for the foreign forces to leave, since the FADM are not considered a match for the ASWJ forces. The local narrative is that the FADM forces run and leave their equipment behind when facing the ASWJ and often even collaborate with the ASWJ.³¹

29 Anonymous 16, “Interview”.

30 Anonymous 16, “Interview”; Anonymous 17, “Interview”, 15 August 2023.

31 Anonymous 18, “Interview”, 13 August 2023.

Table 1: Stakeholder matrix of the Islamic insurgency in Mozambique

Characteristics	Size: approx. 350-1 000 militants Village attacks are conducted with around 500 men Attacks on FADM positions: 45-200 men Ambushes on FADM columns: 3-25 men Sabotage and intimidation: 3-5 men
	Location: Mainly Cabo Delgado province, recently expanding to the neighbouring provinces of Niassa and Nampula.
	Allies: Islamist groups in neighbouring countries, e.g., Tanzania, Somalia, DRC, and Kenya. IS/Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) also claimed to be involved in the attacks.
	Scope: Regional
	Membership: Disaffected youth in Cabo Delgado and Nampula; minority youth from Tanzania, Uganda, and the Great Lakes Region; ex-leaders of mosques as the mobilisers; FADM military personnel who retired, were expelled or deserted; and other commanders of the military wing. Only men.
Positions	Rule by a hardline version of Islamic law in Cabo Delgado.
	Establish a caliphate in the region – unconfirmed.
Interests/ needs	Interests: Undermining and degrading the Mozambican government's military and political authority.
	Needs: Gaining local support and acceptance from local communities, and gaining control of natural resources in Cabo Delgado.
Resources	Military: AK-47, PKM and RPG-7 guns, and 60 and 80 mm artillery mortars. Bladed and sharp weapons: Machetes, axes, knives, and sticks.
	Economic: Financed through electronic money transfers from sympathisers (individuals and private organisations) and organised crime syndicates (timber, precious stones, poaching, and drug trafficking).
	Sociopolitical: Capacity to influence local communities by disrupting traditional mosques and criticising local Muslims for not adequately abiding by Islamic law.
	Media: Extensive use of the web and social media.

Table 2: Key insurgent actors (February 2023)³²

Name	Country of origin	Place of study	Designation
Abu Sorraca Also known as: • Bin Omar • Bourno Mari Sulieman • Abdala Mohammed Abdala • Bonomade Machude Omar	Mozambique Allegedly has a Tanzanian passport	Kenya Zanzibar	Leader of the group/ operations commander
Abu Yasir Hassan	Tanzania	Allegedly spent time in eastern DRC	Spiritual leader of the group (possibly deceased)
Haroon Farid Haroon	Mozambique	Pemba	Replaced Sorraca until he returned in 2022
Sheik Muhamudu	Mozambique	Unknown	Senior cell leader
Sheik Ibrahim	Unknown	Unknown	Senior cell leader
Abu Faisal	Unknown	Unknown	Senior cell leader
Ahmed Sharif	Kenya	Unknown	Unknown
Sheikh Hasan Ali	Zanzibar	Unknown	Unknown
Musa	Kenya	Unknown	Unknown
Neru	Mozambique	Zanzibar	Unknown
Nordeen Ali	Tanzania	Unknown	Unknown
Sheikh Momadisa	Mozambique	Unknown	Unknown
Suleiman	Mozambique	Unknown	Unknown
MM	Mali	Unknown	Recruiter operating in Pemba marketplace
Abdula Rumani	Zanzibar	Zanzibar	Recruiter

32 Fieldwork interviews, 2022 and 2023.

Since the announcement of the establishment of a caliphate³³ in Cabo Delgado in June 2022, the strategy of the ASWJ has changed.³⁴ As seen in other IS-inspired conflict zones, the approach used is to accommodate the local population, in some ways similar to the “winning hearts and minds” (WHAM) strategy of military operations. The WHAM strategy involves paying for supplies and providing resources for local communities. One informant used an example: a coastal community had ASWJ patrolling, and they saw a fisherman standing with a broken net. The ASWJ then offered money to the fisherman, allowing him to buy a new net.³⁵ In this way, the ASWJ secured the loyalty of local communities, which still had full access to the markets and supplies in the major urban centres in Macomia.³⁶

The aforementioned marginalisation of the province has also fueled the crime–violence nexus in Cabo Delgado and, consequently, weak governance structures and the lack of local and regional viable economic activities and sustainable employment options. The weak governance in Cabo Delgado serves the interests of criminal networks. Local sources underlined that narcotrafickers prefer a situation of instability because they can better choose their place and time to transport drugs in collaboration with ASWJ and other armed groups.³⁷ In addition, if the army and security forces are occupied with responses to violent extremism, attention is drawn away from drug trafficking, allowing narcotrafickers to expand their reach since they operate well on the margins of the formal state. Human trafficking also stands out as a crime fuelled by conflict in Cabo Delgado. The insurgents have abducted several women in the region, and other sources also point to the trafficking of ivory, rubies, and wood as funding sources for the insurgents.³⁸

According to the 309 survey responses and 28 informant interviews conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the local people identified the causes of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado in this order:

1. Discovery of minerals and natural gas;
2. Illegal arms flow;
3. Economic marginalisation;
4. Elite greed;

33 It is important to note that the establishment of the caliphate was more in name than in practice on the ground. However, it served the intentions of the ASWJ and changed the strategic approach to the local population.

34 Anonymous 18, “Interview”, 13 August 2023.

35 Anonymous 16, “Interview”.

36 It is important to note that while official representatives, including the FADM, have been squeezed out of these coastal zones and schools are not working, public transport in and out of these areas still functions and is being used by the communities and AS alike. The absence of attacks against the local population should not be mistaken for a lack of capacity among AS, but merely a change of strategy and because AS was waiting for SAMIM and the RDF to leave. SAMIM, prematurely, left by June 2024 and it is very unlikely that the FADM, despite receiving training from the US and EUTM, will be able and especially willing to take over the full provision of security for the AOR of SAMIM.

37 UNODC, “UNODC and Mozambique’s Criminal Justice Officials Present Findings”.

38 Ibid; US Department of State, “2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mozambique”.

5. Poor governance;
6. Ethnic marginalisation;
7. Youth unemployment; and
8. Political exclusion.³⁹

Their study reveals that while violent extremism is the most critical concern for the local people, they are well-informed about the regional economic disparity between the Mozambican northern and southern provinces and the elite control of the resources undergirding the conflict.⁴⁰ This stresses the aforementioned point that marginalisation, weak governance and elite corruption play a critical role in understanding the drivers of the conflict. For the locals, Cabo Delgado's richness in ruby, gold, graphite, and liquified natural gas attracted different groups such as the ASWJ, traffickers, elites, and giant foreign companies,⁴¹ who took advantage of the region's underdevelopment and weak law enforcement by the state. To recruit more members, the violent extremist group exploits the area's condition, particularly the lack of essential social services, low literacy rates, and the high unemployment rates among youths, to legitimise their propaganda of enacting radical Islamic laws in the area.

Apart from the socio-economic conditions, the researchers also analysed the role of ethnicity and religion in the insurgency, despite the low ranking of ethnicity as a conflict driver, corruption and nepotism in government positions by the Makonde people's ethnic tensions among themselves and with the Mwani and Macua people.⁴² The study also mentions that it is apparent that religious groups in Mozambique have also co-existed peacefully over time. However, examining the religious affiliation of these ethnic groups and the instrumentalisation of religion by violent extremists is essential to understanding how religion can be a tool for instigating violence or building peace.⁴³ Exploring the role of religious actors in building peace implies the need for intra-faith and interfaith dialogues for reconciliation. In addition, the study stressed the political contexts in Mozambique that drive the insurgency. The occurrence of electoral violence in the post-civil war elections, elite competition, and bad governance has acted as a catalyst for violent extremism to flourish in the region.⁴⁴ Finally, Mozambique's weak security sector was exploited by the insurgents to expand rapidly. The armed force and Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM) are relatively small and poorly equipped and trained.^{45 46} A key issue in securing the future stability of Mozambique, not just in Cabo Delgado, will be to add and

39 Martin Ewi et al., *Violent Extremism in Mozambique*.

40 Ibid, pp. 20-21.

41 Ibid, pp. 20-21.

42 Ibid, p. 16.

43 Ibid, pp. 18-22.

44 Ibid, p. 21.

45 Musinguzi Blanshe, "Rwanda-Mozambique: Tough quest to secure Cabo Delgado", January 2024, <https://www.theafricareport.com/333744/rwanda-mozambique-tough-quest-to-secure-cabo-delgado>

46 Cilliers et al., "What would it take to stabilise Cabo Delgado?"

improve capacity in the FADM and the PRM, thereby enabling the security sector to better address and handle domestic security challenges professionally and within the constitutionally mandated role. SAMIM's failure to deliver on this mandated task was critical to the long-term stability. Other actors, like the US and the EU, have provided training to the security forces, but they lacked capacity and found it difficult to absorb more training. This can also explain why it was difficult for SAMIM to deliver on this part of its mandate.

The data collected during fieldwork demonstrates that the insurgents have organised themselves into smaller and more agile groups due to the increased military pressure, typically hiding and operating from the forests. As a direct result, the local population is deriving far fewer direct benefits from the insurgency. There is an organised dispersion of insurgent attacks and responses. The Maputo government has had to strike a balance between increasing its military footprint, including the involvement of foreign militaries, while not being perceived by the locals as escalating the situation and furthering the state repression in Cabo Delgado.

In summary, the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, is a complex issue with multiple causes, drivers and overlapping contexts. One of the primary factors is the region's longstanding marginalisation and poverty, which has fueled competition for resources such as land and jobs while exacerbating tensions between different ethnic and religious groups. Additionally, there is an ineffective government presence in terms of security and essential services in the region. The socio-economic causes of the conflict in Cabo Delgado are primarily rooted in the region's prolonged marginalisation and poverty. The area has consistently been one of the least developed in Mozambique, with low infrastructure, education, and healthcare levels. This lack of development has resulted in limited economic opportunities for local communities, leading to high levels of unemployment and poverty. The current situation in the northern province, compounded by longstanding issues inherited from the colonial era, has intensified competition for resources and heightened ethnic and religious tensions. Moreover, discovering natural gas reserves in the area has attracted significant interest and investment. However, these benefits have accrued mainly to a small elite, further aggravating local resentment.

2.2. Mozambique's response efforts to the insurgency

The Mozambique government's response to the insurgency has favoured military and counter-terrorism (CT) operations. At first, the Mozambican government refrained from framing the threat as an insurgency but rather as "pure banditry".⁴⁷ The Mozambique government's response contributed to closing the civic space in Cabo Delgado due to restrictions in access to information, obstacles to freedom of expression and the press, and increased risk for human rights

47 Milton Keynes, "Mozambique: Nyusi tells AR: Cabo Delgado War is About Greed of Insurgents – with No Mention of Greed of Frelimo", *Mozambique News Reports and Clippings*, 20 December 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202112200285.html>

defenders.⁴⁸ Mozambican security forces were also implicated in serious abuses, including arbitrary arrests, abductions, torture, excessive use of force against unarmed civilians, intimidation and extrajudicial executions.⁴⁹ Another dimension of the local security forces' responses to the conflict was that most soldiers did not originate from the area, were ill-disciplined, and were poorly paid and equipped. The result was that local security forces often fled when confronted with the ASWJ, leaving equipment and supplies behind. Several informants even mentioned that elements of the FADM cooperated with the ASWJ, which explained why supplies, equipment, and munitions ended up in the hands of the insurgents.⁵⁰ The limited capability, capacity, and will to continue fighting is a pattern recognised in other conflict areas on the continent. However, this topic is far more complex than alluded to here and is outside the scope of this study.⁵¹ The weak state of the security institutions provided an opportunity for the insurgents to transform from guerrilla hit-and-run tactics to capturing and holding territory and urban areas with relatively limited force. The country's weak security institutions are a product of the 1992 agreement that formally ended the year-long civil war fought between FRELIMO and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO). The two organisations had over 105 000 soldiers. At the war's end, the plan was to form a joint national army of 30 000 soldiers from both sides.⁵² However, at the time of the outbreak of the Cabo Delgado conflict, the FADM had an estimated armed force of only 15 000 because enlisting was voluntary, and the government had made no room for RENAMO veterans to enlist. Politically, tensions have remained high between the governing FRELIMO and RENAMO, among other reasons, due to the lack of effective implementation of the 1992 peace agreement.

The political tensions also offer some explanation as to why the conflict in Cabo Delgado was allowed to transform from a nascent threat in 2017 into a full-scale insurgency by early 2021 without a significant response. For the elite in FRELIMO, it was considered a "small" conflict compared to the risk of renewed conflict with RENAMO. A conflict with RENAMO constitutes a direct threat to FRELIMO's existence and perceived monopoly on power, while the conflict with the ASWJ does not. The lengths that FRELIMO is willing to go to stay in power were visible during the October 2024 national election, when widespread election fraud was used to

48 Centre for Democracy and Development, "Northern Resilience and Integrated Development Strategy to cost USD 2.5 billion", 15 May 2022, p. 1, <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Northern-Resilience-and-Integrated-Development-Strategy-to-cost-USD-2.5-billion.pdf>; Amnesty International, "What I Saw is Death"; Human Rights Watch, "Mozambique".

49 Human Rights Watch, "Mozambique".

50 Anonymous 18, "Interview"; Anonymous 17, "Interview"; Anonymous 15, "Interview".

51 Thomas Mandrup, "Rumble in the Jungle: Private Sources of Security, Order and Disorder in the DRC", in *On Strategy – Strategic Theory and Contemporary African Armed Conflicts*, 2011, pp. 179–197; Thomas Mandrup, "AU and AMISOM in Somalia after 2021 – Taking Stock of Lessons Learned and Moving Forward to New Beginnings for Somalia", n.d.; Maya Mynster Christensen et al., "War amongst the People' and the Absent Enemy: Towards a Cultural Paradigm Shift?" Danish Defence College, 2014; Eeben Barlow, *Composite Warfare: The Conduct of Successful Ground Force Operations in Africa*, Durban: 30 Degrees South, 2016; Herbert M. Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001; Francois Vrey et al., eds, *On Military Culture: Theory, Practice and African Armed Forces*, Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2014.

52 Joseph Hanlon, "Mozambique: 'the war ended 17 years ago, but we are still poor'", *Conflict, Security & Development*, 10(1): 77–102, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903553902>

keep a grip on power, and there was a violent crackdown on protesters and the assassination of political opponents.

In addition to the small size of the military forces, political problems and focus elsewhere, the FADM and the rest of the security forces were also challenged by the geography, where they simply found it difficult to respond, similar to the problems faced by the DRC army in its fight against insurgents in Eastern DRC.⁵³ In the case of Cabo Delgado, there has, since the start of the counter-insurgency (COIN) operation, been a discrepancy between the availability of effective local forces and numbers, capabilities, and then the rudimentary infrastructure, the forested areas and general terrain, which has made it next to impossible for the FADM to dominate the province. As one SAMIM special-forces operative stressed, it often took several days of vulnerable foot patrols to reach designated operative targets. Consequently, it has been relatively easy for ASWJ to avoid the FADM, grow capacity, and choose the battles. Only after the introduction of SAMIM and the RDF contingents, when capable conventional military forces undertook operations, did the balance change, and severe pressure was put on the insurgents. It forced the ASWJ to change operational tactics from controlling urban areas and stretches of land to traditional, smaller guerrilla units.

Due to the lack of capacity of the local security forces and resistance against asking for external military assistance, the government introduced private military and security company (PMSC) assistance in an attempt to contain and neutralise the insurgency and to augment numbers, capacity and capabilities.⁵⁴ The first PMSC to operate in Cabo Delgado was the Wagner Group. They operated between September and December 2019 but withdrew after sustaining heavy losses. Between April 2020 and April 2021, the Mozambican government hired the Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) to provide direct air support and training for the Mozambican army. DAG was a company that already operated in Mozambique in wildlife protection and anti-poaching efforts and had a close connection to the FRELIMO government, but had, as a company, limited experience in undertaking COIN-type efforts. It is also important to note that the DAG contract was with the Mozambican Ministry of the Interior since the COIN efforts at this stage were still considered a police responsibility, while the FADM played a supporting role. The fact that the FRELIMO government insisted that the operation was a policing matter also explains why they resisted pressure to allow for a regional force to be deployed for so long. Not being happy with the lack of impact that DAG had on fighting the advancing role and influence of the ASWJ, the government, in the spring of 2021, signed a contract with the Burnham Global Consortium, a subsidiary of the arms manufacturer Paramount, for the provision of military equipment in the form of armoured vehicles, helicopters, training and strategic advice.⁵⁵

53 Alexandra Novosseloff et al., "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in the DRC/MONUC-MONUSCO", Report No. 3, 2019, https://www.nupi.no/content/pdf_preview/28321/file/EPON-MONUSCO-LowRes.pdf

54 Jeffrey Love, "When Private Military Operations Fail: the Case of Mozambique", March 2023, <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2023/03/06/when-private-military-operations-fail-the-case-of-mozambique>

55 Centre of Public Integrity, *How much does the State spend on the war in Cabo Delgado and how does it spend it?* August 2021, <https://clubofmozambique.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/How-much-does-the-State-spend-on-the-war-in-Cabo-Delgado-and-how-does-it-spend-it-1.pdf>

The Burnham contract also illustrates the increased pressure that the FRELIMO government found itself under since the spread and increased influence of the ASWJ in Cabo Delgado led to large-scale internal displacements, the fall of strategically important urban centres such as Mocímboa da Praia and Palma, and the suspension of the large-scale LNG development projects in the province. The concern was that the government could lose control of the entire province and that IS would be able to establish a bridgehead from which to expand its activities to other states in the region.

Overall, the PMSCs proved ineffective military tools in containing the insurgency due to their mandate, low deployed numbers, and equipment available.⁵⁶ However, DAG did, within its limited mandate, provide some valuable support for the security forces and played a crucial role during the successful insurgency attack on Palma in March 2021, where they managed to airlift a significant number of people out, while the local security forces had stopped operating and had fled. DAG's use of attack helicopters was somewhat effective, but it lacked proper and effective ground operations. The ASWJ adapted their operations to DAG's operations, making the attack helicopters less effective over time. The attack on Palma happened after the DAG contract had been terminated and the logistical support hub in Palma had been dismantled.

It is also important to remember that, apart from Wagner, the PMSCs were not tasked with engaging the insurgents on their own directly but were deployed in support of the local security forces. The FADM repeatedly failed to act as a professional military force and was unable to provide security for the local population and create conditions for early recovery initiatives. Burnham's task was, alongside the EUTM, to train and prepare the local security forces for the operations. This has had a visible positive impact on the ability of the local security forces to operate independently, so the critique against PMSCs should be focused on the role and tasks, not on the development of the COIN efforts against the insurgents, for which they, apart from Wagner, had limited roles. The lessons learned from the role played by the PMSCs in Cabo Delgado, setting aside the ideological discussion on whether PMSCs should be used at all, show that PMSCs can play a crucial role in augmenting local security forces in their attempts to curb a security threat, mainly when the local security forces have limited capacity and lack specific capabilities. However, the impact and effect of the PMSC are dependent on the local security forces' ability to absorb and make use of the PMSC's tools effectively, both in terms of identifying training and equipment needs, but also, in the case of the DAG air support, tactically, operationally and strategically integrate the capabilities in the combined efforts and security responses. The Mozambican security forces have minimal capacity, including the

56 Centro de Integridade Pública, "Resort to private military companies to fight the insurgency in Cabo Delgado: without transparency and with disastrous results", 2020, <https://cipmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/insurgency-in-Cabo-Delgado.pdf>; Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, *National and regional responses to the Cabo Delgado crisis*; Borges Nhamirre, "Will foreign intervention end terrorism in Cabo Delgado?" ISS Policy Brief 165, October 2021, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/policy-brief-165.pdf>; Guy Martin, "PMCs were vital to the survival of Cabo Delgado – DAG", DefenceWeb, 20 January 2022, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/pmcs-were-vital-to-the-survival-of-cabo-delgado-dag>; Andrew Cheatham et al., "Regional Security Support: A Vital First Step for Peace in Mozambique", 23 June 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/regional-security-support-vital-first-step-peace-mozambique>

ability to absorb and integrate assistance from PMSCs and international forces and training missions, which also negatively impacted the SAMIM deployment and its ability to implement its mandate.

Because of the deteriorating security situation and the suspension of multinational LNG projects in Cabo Delgado, the Mozambican government was forced during the spring of 2021 to change its approach and operational approach and had to accept the deployment of regional and bilateral military forces in an attempt to contain and neutralise the insurgency. The government entered into agreements for support and training with several partners, including Portugal, the EU, and the US, while Burnham continued its training and equipment contract. However, the most significant support came from the agreement with Rwanda, which deployed a robust military force with financial backing from France and the EU and had direct strategic interests in the offshore gas projects around Cabo Delgado. The bilateral agreement with Rwanda was politically controversial because it was seen as a rejection of the regional organisation, SADC, among other reasons. Under South African leadership, SADC had long called for a regional intervention to be allowed to curb the insurgency that constituted a security threat to the entire region.⁵⁷

Rwanda deployed its joint military and police force to Cabo Delgado in July 2021.⁵⁸ In a relatively short time, the RDF effectively recaptured towns in its area of operations, enabling displaced people to return. The Rwandan force worked with residents and local authorities in recaptured areas to improve infrastructure, health care and markets.⁵⁹ One of the advantages the RDP had over the SAMIM force was that, in some instances, it was possible to communicate with local communities in Swahili, which most SAMIM forces were unable to do. In addition, few among the deployed SAMIM forces could communicate in Portuguese, which made communication with the host nation difficult at all levels. The Rwandan forces generally were professional in their conduct and operations, and they were effective and well-equipped in the fight against insurgents. However, they were still met with suspicion from some elements of the local population.⁶⁰

Interestingly enough, as seen in other UN and AU PSO missions, the RDF has shown itself to be a well-disciplined and effective force. The RDF largely operates according to the 2015 Kigali principles on protecting civilians and restraining the use of force, even under duress and direct attacks.⁶¹ The Rwandan operations in Cabo Delgado have not defeated the insurgency but have

57 Anonymous 14, "Interview", March 2023, Pretoria.

58 ISS, "Rwanda expands its protection of Mozambique's natural resources", February 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/rwanda-expands-its-protection-of-mozambiques-natural-resources>

59 Musinguzi Blanshe, "Mozambique: Anxiety remains as Rwanda protects Cabo Delgado", *The Africa Report*, January 2024, <https://www.theafricareport.com/332053/mozambique-anxiety-remains-as-rwanda-protects-cabo-delgado>

60 Anonymous 18, "Interview"; Anonymous 16, "Interview".

61 Ralph Shield, "Rwanda's troops in Mozambique have done well to protect civilians – the factors at play", *The Conversation*, 27 November, <https://theconversation.com/rwandas-troops-in-mozambique-have-done-well-to-protect-civilians-the-factors-at-play-216205>

managed to diminish its capacity and allowed vast numbers of IDPs to return. According to local informants, the military professionalism and effectiveness shown during encounters meant that the insurgents avoided confrontations with the RDF and increased the trust towards the RDF among the local population.⁶²

At the time of the drawdown of SAMIM from April to June 2024, Rwanda announced that it would increase its deployment and area of operations by 2 000 additional forces,⁶³ in addition to the 2 500 already deployed in Cabo Delgado, to fill the gap left by SAMIM. By late 2024, Rwanda was reported to have 5 000 troops in Cabo Delgado.⁶⁴ The EU has pledged to continue to support the Rwandan operation financially and has, as part of its military training mission in Mozambique, considered providing military equipment for the local security forces in addition.⁶⁵ The EU has, in recent years, been under pressure from Russia and China as they are increasingly assertive, and the EU has allowed lethal weapons assistance to host governments in conflict zones.

62 Anonymous 18, “Interview”; Anonymous 16, “Interview”; Anonymous 19, “Interview”.

63 The distribution of officers between the police and military is not officially available, and the defence cooperation agreement between Rwanda and Mozambique remains a secret.

64 Borges Nhamirre, “Are Rwandan troops becoming Cabo Delgado’s main security provider?” Defence Web, 22 October 2024, https://www.defencweb.co.za/african-news/are-rwandan-troops-becoming-cabo-delgados-main-security-provider/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

65 Reuters, “EU boosts military support to gas-rich Mozambique amid energy crisis”, 8 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-boosts-support-southern-african-military-mission-mozambique-2022-09-08>

3. Establishment and mandate of SAMIM

On 23 June 2021, SADC approved the deployment of a peace support operation to help Mozambique counter the insurgency in Cabo Delgado.⁶⁶ The decision followed growing regional concerns over the visible, fast-deteriorating security situation in Cabo Delgado, the inability of the Mozambican security forces to contain the problem and the dramatic humanitarian crisis that followed the spread and increased intensity of the conflict. It is noticeable that the Mozambican government resisted regional military assistance for so long despite losing territory to the ASWJ. SADC deployed a reconnaissance mission to assess the security situation and provide recommendations for the configuration of the force.⁶⁷ Based on the recommendations produced, SAMIM was mandated to:

1. Support the Republic of Mozambique in combating acts of terrorism and violent extremism by neutralising the threat and restoring security to create a secure environment.
2. Support the Republic of Mozambique to strengthen peace and maintain security through the implementation of courses of action recommended by the Organ Troika Summit plus Mozambique held on 27 May 2021.
3. Support the Republic of Mozambique in restoring law and order in the affected areas of Cabo Delgado Province.
4. Provide air and maritime support in order to enhance the FADM's operational capabilities.
5. Provide logistics and training to enhance FADM's capability to combat terrorism.

⁶⁶ SADC, "Experts agree that foreign intervention will help Mozambique's Cabo Delgado".

⁶⁷ SADC, "SADC restricted report".

6. Provide support to the Government of the Republic of Mozambique, in collaboration with humanitarian agencies in the Republic of Mozambique, to continue providing humanitarian relief to the population affected by the terrorist activities, including the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Mozambique was apparently at first not in favour of a SADC deployment but was later pressured and persuaded by the other SADC countries to accept an operation to prevent a spill-over of the insurgency into neighbouring countries and negative perceptions about the stability of the SADC region.⁶⁸ Despite agreeing to accept the SADC mission, the Government of Mozambique seems to have remained reluctant to cooperate with SADC, and this lack of cooperation on the ground is one of the reasons why SADC decided not to continue the operation beyond June 2024.⁶⁹

SAMIM consisted of six troop-contributing countries (TCCs) – Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania.⁷⁰ Zimbabwe and DRC never deployed. SAMIM was a South African-dominated operation from the outset, deploying the bulk of the forces and specialised capabilities. Table 3 provides an overview of SAMIM's TCCs.

Table 3: SAMIM's TCCs, with their initial deployment numbers as of October 2022

Country	Troop numbers
Angola	20 personnel and an Ilyushin Il-76 transport aircraft
Botswana	296 personnel
Lesotho	125 personnel
Namibia	8 staff-officers
South Africa	1 495 personnel
Tanzania	274 personnel
Total	2 218

Source: Interviews and press releases.

68 *Africa Confidential*, "Nyusi angers the region", 62(11), 27 May 2021, <https://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/13411/Nyusi-angers-the-region>

69 Phillimon Mmeso, "Mozambique frustrates SADC leaders", *The Patriot*, 2 May 2021, https://thepatriot.co.bw/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/The-Patriot-02-05-2021_web.pdf

70 Parliamentary Monitoring Group, "SANDF deployment as part of MONUSCO; SAMIDRC withdrawal; SANDF Employment extension; Outstanding departmental responses; with Deputy Ministers", 9 May 2025; SADC, "SADC Mission in Mozambique".

A civilian HOM was appointed and led SAMIM as the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the SADC Organ. The mission also had a civilian deputy HOM. The civilian component had minimal capacity and consisted of three experts, 23 police officers, two correctional officers, and the Civil-Military Operations Centre (CIMOC).⁷¹ A Force Commander led the military component. The small civilian component comprised police and correctional services personnel and a gender advisor, who, financed by the EU, organised workshops for local correctional service personnel on non-violent conflict resolution and human rights.

Table 4: SAMIM command structure (February 2023)

Civilian component				
Name	Position	Nationality	Appointed	Status
Prof. Mpho Molomo	Head of Mission	Botswana	15 July 2021	Incumbent
Mr Kingstone Mazuba	Deputy Head of Mission/Head of Civilians	Zambia	Nov 2022	Incumbent
Military component				
Maj. Gen. Xolani Mankayi	Force Commander	South Africa	15 July 2021	Incumbent
Brigadier Dumisani Ndzinge	Deputy Force Commander	Botswana	15 July 2021	8 February 2022
Brigadier Simon Barwabatsile	Deputy Force Commander	Botswana	8 Feb 2022	Incumbent

Table 5: SAMIM civilian component structure (February 2023)

Position	Nationality	Status
Deputy Head of Mission/Head of Civilians	Zambia	Incumbent
Commissioner of Police	South Africa	Incumbent
Deputy Police Commissioner	Namibia	Incumbent
Chief of Correctional Services	Mozambique	Incumbent
Deputy Commissioner of Correctional Services	Zambia	Incumbent
Senior Police Officer	Mozambique	Incumbent

⁷¹ SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs, “Lessons learned for the future: Conflict prevention and peace-building in the SADC Region Northern Development Agency of Mozambique African Peace and Security Architecture Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ Status of Forces Agreement”, 2024.

A central part of SAMIM's mandate was the Early Recovery Mechanism (ERM), a model used in, for instance, the Lake Chad basin and previously in Iraq and Afghanistan to create visible improvement of livelihoods quickly and allow for IDPs to return home. The ERM forms part of the Cabo Delgado Recovery Plan (RPCD), a more long-term plan to address some of the structural issues causing the conflict in the first place.⁷² The combined efforts included the ERM and quick-impact projects, followed by the RPCD to secure sustainability and create lasting peace and security in Cabo Delgado and all three Northern provinces. Significantly enough, the Mozambican national government did, as part of the RPCD, provide financial resources of US\$300 million to implement RPCD and early recovery in the six most affected districts in the war.⁷³ However, the critique against the government was that it prioritised resources and efforts in reconstructing infrastructure in the Afungi Peninsula in the Palma district and the Mocímboa da Praia district, which also host international LNG construction projects.⁷⁴ The argument is that the government once again showed a desire to prioritise resource extraction and the interests of multinational companies over the suffering of the local population.

As part of the combined RPCD, the military tools and efforts were to create the space needed for the ERM and RPCD to be implemented. SADC and the national government support the plans, but are predominantly funded by various international organisations and bilateral donors who have drafted and implemented the RPCD, including the EU and US governments.⁷⁵ Even though SAMIM, in its mandate, is tasked with providing support for the Mozambican government and international humanitarian agencies, it does not mean that the mission on a large scale has been involved in humanitarian and development efforts. The South African government has had that ambition, but it never materialised on a larger scale.⁷⁶ However, despite the problems faced in the effective implementation of the ERM and in SAMIM undertaking its mandated reconstruction role, and the 2023-2024 upsurge in fighting, a sizable portion of the refugees and IDPs in Cabo Delgado have been able to return home. The progress is partly due to combined efforts despite the operational limitations.

3.1. The strategic objectives of SAMIM

The SAMIM mission had four main strategic objectives, which were all related to the six mandated tasks. The SAMIM objectives were:

1. Neutralising the insurgent groups;

⁷² Borges Nhamirre, "Cabo Delgado Reconstruction Plan Prioritises Districts under the Influence of the Gas Industry", Centro De Integridade Publica, 2022.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ US Government, "The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability 10-Year Plan for Mozambique 2022-2032", Washington, 2022.

⁷⁶ Anonymous 19, "Interview", 2023.

2. Assisting the FADM;
3. Providing training and advice to the FADM; and
4. Providing humanitarian and development aid.

In many ways, the strategic objectives of the mission resemble those found in similar stabilisation operations, where non-kinetic and non-military tools supplement the initial robust military response. These tools are typically employed by other international actors, like the UN, EU or international non-government organisations, which incrementally take prominence when the initial military operations neutralise the adversary and create space for the civilian operations. In the case of SAMIM, the initial deployment was dominated by a relatively large Special Operations Force (SOF), which played a central role in attempting to neutralise the insurgent groups. SAMIM, therefore, was very different from traditional multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs), as it was not informed by a UN-style PKO doctrine, but by classical COIN and CT operational thinking. The distinction is important since the ASF doctrine has six operational scenarios that do not cover COIN and CT-style operations.⁷⁷ However, as mentioned previously, this was a political signal, allowing other elements of the strategic objectives to be implemented, and it should be seen as a matter of doctrinal change. The distinction between PKO doctrine and the reality on the ground is important. It captures some of the discrepancies and strategic and operational tensions between military doctrine being implemented and mandates and rhetoric found in the mission documents in many AU-mandated and authorised missions.⁷⁸

As part of the stabilisation phase model, the idea was that long-term civilian reconstruction efforts should gradually overtake the initial military-dominated effort based on improved security. As previously mentioned, the fact that a large majority of the IDPs had been able to return home by 2024 indicates that the combined effort of SAMIM, FADM and RDF has reduced the territorial presence and control of the insurgency. Although they have not neutralised the insurgency, they have diminished its military capacity. However, the situation on the ground was more complex than indicated here, illustrating the old strategic point that time is on the insurgents' side. The prolific writer and military strategist on African security, conflicts and military operations, Eeben Barlow, argues that in military campaigns, the intervener has six months to defeat an adversary and allow ERM to be implemented before the operations and tactics have to be changed.⁷⁹

77 SAMIM was deployed with reference to ASF Scenario 6, which covers offensive operations, and was in 2002 changed to Scenario 5, a peacekeeping doctrine style of operation.

78 Mandrup, "A Changing Security Architecture"; Thomas Mandrup, "Afrikanske Stabiliseringsindsatser – Tre Praktiske Eksempler", in *Stabiliseringsoperationer*, ed. Troels B. Henningsen and David Vestenskov, Odense: SDU Press, 2024; Karlsrud, "How Ad Hoc Coalitions Deinstitutionalize International Institutions".

79 Eeben Barlow, "Lecture", 15 April 2016; Barlow, *Composite Warfare*.

From the civilian side, the UNDP operates with a timeline of a maximum of 24 months, from the initial military operations to practical ERM projects with a visible impact on the local population, before the risk of the security situation deteriorates once again.⁸⁰ The timelines are relevant when scrutinising the SAMIM deployment, especially the mission's impact on the security situation on the ground and its ability to implement the mandated tasks and strategic objectives. In the July 2023 SADC Troika+ meeting assessment, it was concluded that SAMIM had successfully achieved its objective of reducing the insurgents' capacity and providing assistance to the FADM. However, the mission could not provide training since the Mozambican counterparts had not identified their training needs.⁸¹

3.2. Reducing the strength of the insurgent groups

When SAMIM deployed in August 2021, ASWJ controlled large sections of the Cabo Delgado province, especially the areas around Mocímboa da Praia, as well as the rural areas outside Palma and most of the coastline. SAMIM was initially responsible for operations in Macomia, Mueda and Nangade, while the RDF ran operations in the Palma and Mocímboa da Praia districts.⁸² The Mozambican security forces were responsible for the rest of the province. The initial idea was to press AS from two sides and force them to leave their bases and the safety of the areas they had occupied. The strategy was partly successful because the RDF managed to clear insurgents from their area of operations or area of responsibility (AOR), while SAMIM was less successful.⁸³ Especially around Macomia town, a densely forested area, AS has managed to maintain a presence. One of the challenges is that the insurgency, to a large extent, is homegrown and localised, as the insurgents stem from the local population.⁸⁴ The forces, therefore, had to deplete the capacity of the AS while gaining support from the wider population, but without being able to address the typical political issues that had caused the conflict in the first place.

The RDF's operational success meant that while AS was forced out of the RDF AOR, they migrated to other areas and managed to settle and launch operations there. SAMIM did not manage to counter the ASWJ to the same extent, which allowed them to continue to operate, albeit in reduced numbers, since the SAMIM forces did manage to inflict heavy casualties.

80 Anonymous 20, Interview, 5 December 2024.

81 SADC, "SADC Troika+ Internal Report on SAMIM", Gaborone: SADC, 2023.

82 Anonymous 18, "Interview"; Anonymous 19, "Interview".

83 Anonymous 18, "Interview"; Anonymous 16, "Interview"; Anonymous 19, "Interview".

84 Anonymous 17, "Interview"; Anonymous 19, "Interview".

3.3. The configuration of the SAMIM force

In April 2021, the SADC assessment mission deployed to Mozambique concluded that SADC needed to support Mozambique's efforts to handle the threat from ASWJ by deploying a robust military force under Scenario 6 of the ASF doctrine.⁸⁵ The force was to consist of air, navy and land elements, totalling 2 900 soldiers. The report stipulated that the mission and deployment were to fall into four phases. The primary objective was to reduce and neutralise the ASWJ force and assist FADM in regaining control of the areas of the Cabo Delgado province that the insurgents controlled. However, many of the assessment team's recommended capabilities were not given to SAMIM when deployed. The absence of capabilities included attack helicopters and several intelligence assets that the TCCs had promised but did not deploy.⁸⁶ Another initial challenge faced by SAMIM was that the Mozambican government was slow in drafting the status of forces agreement (SOFA) between Mozambique and SADC, which delayed the deployment by several months.⁸⁷ It has not been possible to establish whether this was due to the red tape characterising the Mozambican bureaucracy or if it was a deliberate move from the government based on its reluctance to allow SADC forces to deploy, as shown in the complex working relationship in daily operations later. However, the effect was the same, highlighting the tense relationship that sometimes existed between the host nation and SAMIM.⁸⁸

The assessment report presented at the SADC leadership Troika+ summit in July 2023 concluded that the mission had suffered from the absence of capabilities that the TCCs had not provided as promised or that the SADC had not authorised. The communication equipment also became a problem since it was only interoperable between the different contingents, making it challenging to communicate with other units. The result was that SAMIM became less agile and responsive, making it difficult to implement its mandate. Peace missions, particularly SAMIM, also form part of highly political contextual realities, affecting the mission's ability to execute its mandates. The relationships among SAMIM, the local security forces and the RDF were often problematic and inefficient. In practice, that meant that joint operational planning, sharing of actionable intelligence and planned operations against the insurgents were politically blocked.

The lack of coordination and cooperation made security provisions even more complex in Cabo Delgado. It negatively affected the ability of SAMIM and the combined security efforts to address security challenges posed by ASWJ effectively. SAMIM was only partly configured to operate effectively in the AOR, where the insurgents made effective use of the terrain. For instance, SAMIM specialised units had to walk long distances in dense forest environments,

85 SADC, "SADC Restricted Report".

86 Anonymous 17, "Interview".

87 Nhamirre, "Cabo Delgado Reconstruction Plan".

88 Anonymous 19, "Interview"; Anonymous 17, "Interview"; Anonymous 21, "Interview", 21 August 2023.

which had been booby-trapped and were generally inaccessible.⁸⁹ The lack of air and hot-pursuit assets and munitions was a major factor. It is fair to say that SAMIM, in the end, contributed to containment but did not maximise the military options. The unhealthy reliance on local forces (militia) to provide security for many communities has also been a problem.⁹⁰ The local militias originated primarily from the Makonde ethnic group. The conflict in Cabo Delgado was also a conflict between ethnic and religious communities. The Makonde traditionally have had closer ties with FRELIMO, while the Mwami, being predominantly Muslim and coastal, have experienced marginalisation and estrangement from the central government.

89 Anonymous 19, "Interview".

90 Borges Nhamirre, "Cabo Delgado: Two years since the Palma Invasion", ISS Today, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/cabo-delgado-two-years-since-the-palma-invasion>

4. To what degree was SAMIM effective in fulfilling its mandated tasks?

In April 2022, Gen. Rudzani Maphwanya of SANDEF stated:

Since its deployment, SAMIM has registered a number of milestones, including recapturing villages, dislodging terrorists from their bases and seizing weapons and warfare material, which have contributed in creating a relatively secure environment for safer passage of humanitarian support [...]. Additionally, members of the community have developed confidence in SAMIM forces, feeling more secure and allowing internally displaced persons to return to their normal lives.⁹¹

SAMIM succeeded in improving the overall security situation in the districts it has been operating in (Muidumbe, Macomia, Quissanga, Mueda and Nangade). It has successfully neutralised some insurgents, dislodged others and disrupted their operations.⁹² However, due to the terrain, especially the large and heavily forested area of the Catupa forest, the tactics of the insurgents operating in small cells and avoiding direct contact with the security forces, and the insufficient capabilities of the Mozambique army and security forces, SAMIM was not able to consolidate the gains they achieved.⁹³ The ASWJ adapted to SAMIM's presence and operations, and since December 2023, they increased the intensity of their attacks, leading to fresh displacements in the region. From the end of 2023, the UNHCR reported that over 8 000 people have been newly displaced because of attacks by insurgents, and in the last week of February

⁹¹ Basch, "SANDEF Gives an Update".

⁹² Piers Pigou, "SAMIM-A year in review", *Cabo Ligado Monthly*, July 2022, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2077554/Cabo-Ligado-PDF-Monthly-July-22.pdf>

⁹³ Opening remarks made by SADC Executive Secretary Mr Elias Magosi and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as per this link: <https://dailynews.gov.bw/news-detail/64939>

2024 alone, attacks in the Chiure district in Cabo Delgado displaced over 33 000 people.⁹⁴ SAMIM, backed by the EU support package, did make modest contributions to enhancing the capacity of the Mozambican police and correctional services officers in Cabo Delgado.⁹⁵ However, the provision of training for the Mozambican security forces never materialised. The lack of implementation of this part of the mandate was partly because many other actors and donors provided training and equipment facilities, while the Mozambican forces also failed to identify their training needs. The capacity, command and control, and morale of the FADM are limited, preventing them from taking over the security responsibility for the AOR. SAMIM never managed to help enable the local security forces' capacity and specific capabilities, making the security gains unsustainable. The risk is that the improvements will be reversed when the international forces are withdrawn. Fortunately for SAMIM, the RDF has decided to remain and increase its presence in the province, propping up the local security forces.

The increased insecurity was seen in May 2024, when a depleted SANDF force in Macomia came under attack from a potent ASWJ force.⁹⁶ The attack and how it was handled also illustrate that SAMIM had not succeeded in eradicating the threat posed by the ASWJ, which still has significant capacity. However, it is important to remember that SAMIM was deployed to assist the host government in reducing the threat posed by the insurgents, and it has been difficult to obtain good operational and practical cooperation on the ground. The lack of collaboration negatively impacted the ability to implement the ERM and RPCD, which were key elements in securing the sustainability of the progress and objectives achieved.

SAMIM suffered from limited resources, which hindered the mission's reach. SAMIM operated without the two surface patrol ships, a submarine and a maritime surveillance aircraft recommended for its naval component in the original concept. The naval component of the mission was intended to disrupt and prevent the resupply of the insurgents by sea. A South African Navy (SAN) strike craft sent to Cabo Delgado in 2021 withdrew because of mechanical problems and was replaced.⁹⁷ In March 2022, the SAN deployed a replacement frigate with a Maritime Reaction Squadron element, supported by two South African Air Force (SAAF) Oryx helicopters, for interdiction patrols in the SAMIM AOR off the coast of Cabo Delgado.⁹⁸ The Tanzanian Navy also provided the TNS Fatundu, which served alongside the SAN assets.⁹⁹ However, the naval presence was not constant, and ASWJ could operate relatively freely dur-

94 UNHCR, "Displaced people in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado plead for peace".

95 Cheatham et al., *Regional Security Support*; DefenceWeb, "Pemba peacebuilding meeting hears confidence and trust essential in Cabo Delgado", 1 July 2022, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/pemba-peacebuilding-meeting-hears-confidence-and-trust-essential-in-cabo-delgado>

96 Peter Fabricius, "Depleted SANDF Troops in Mozambique Battle Islamic State-Inspired Insurgents in Macomia", *Daily Maverick*, 2024, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-05-12-depleted-sandf-troops-in-northern-mozambique-battle-islamic-state-insurgents-in-macomia>

97 Peter Fabricius, "Wars can't be fought on the cheap: Experts and special forces call for more infantry and equipment in Mozambique", *Daily Maverick*, 11 January 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-01-11-wars-cant-be-fought-on-the-cheap-experts-and-special-forces-call-for-more-infantry-and-equipment-in-mozambique>

98 DefenceWeb, "Mozambique duty for SAS Spioenkop", 19 April 2022, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/mozambique-duty-for-sas-spioenkop/?referrer=newsletter>

99 Ibid.

ing significant periods of the SAMIM deployment. Free access allowed a continued inflow of supplies and personnel and undermined the military gains that SAMIM and the RDF had on the battlefield. The lack of effective coordination and integration between the civilian and military components is not unique to the operations in Northern Mozambique, but it has had a significant negative impact on the combined effect of reconstruction projects. The mission could draw some suitable lessons from the efforts around Lake Chad, where a regional security strategy has created a framework for coordinating civilian and military efforts.¹⁰⁰ One of the key lessons from the Northern Nigerian case was that unity of effort can create sustainable progress. This unity has often been lacking in Northern Mozambique, where several informants questioned the government's objectives. As mentioned above, one of the informants argued that something more sinister was happening in Northern Mozambique, which explained the limited progress.¹⁰¹

As for air assets, two SAAF Oryx utility helicopters were deployed, which need to be considered against the initial recommendation of two attack helicopters, two armed helicopters, two utility helicopters, and two hand-launched unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), as of January 2022.¹⁰² By April 2022, SAMIM had four aircraft deployed from the contributing nations.¹⁰³ While the cost of SAMIM has not been made public, South Africa's budget for its portion of the cost of the mission for 2022 was R2.8 billion (about \$170 million).¹⁰⁴ SADC has covered the cost of the mission itself with an internally assessed contribution system, in which all SADC members had to contribute proportionally. In addition, SAMIM has received in-kind equipment and supplies from the AU and approximately €15 million from the EU, mainly in support of reconstruction efforts in Cabo Delgado. However, the lack of external financing for SAMIM contributed to the decision to close the mission and withdraw the forces before the mandate and the strategic objectives had been fulfilled.

100 Thomas Mandrup, "AU Support to the MNJTF", Copenhagen, 2024.

101 Anonymous 17, "Interview".

102 Fabricius, "Wars can't be fought on the cheap"; DefenceWeb, "SAMIM seemingly going nowhere", 2 February 2022, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/samim-seemingly-going-nowhere>; SADC, "SADC Restricted Report".

103 Basch, "SANDF Gives an Update".

104 News24Wire, "Ramaphosa extends SANDF deployment to Mozambique by a year, at cost of R2.8bn", *Polity*, 21 April 2022, <https://www.polity.org.za/article/ramaphosa-extends-sandf-deployment-to-mozambique-by-a-year-at-cost-of-r28bn-2022-04-21>; Pigou, "SADC's Mission in Mozambique".

5. Conclusion

The Mozambican government and regional and international partners have adopted a “security-first” and “stabilisation” approach that followed the classic clear-hold-build linear logic of the first generation of COIN doctrine. There are two problems with this approach. Firstly, SAMIM and the Mozambican army could not hold and build and failed to sufficiently partner with those who could have contributed to such a strategy. The responsibility for coordinating international partners is primarily the responsibility of the Government of Mozambique. As described in the report, coordination between the different military forces and between civilian and military personnel was lacking.

Secondly, we know from several experiments with this COIN doctrine and the academic literature on insurgencies, including research by Mozambican scholars on Cabo Delgado, that the insecurity is only a symptom of deeper political and socio-economic grievances, typically related to centre-periphery marginalisation, neglect and exclusion. Even if the government and its partners were successful in their campaign to counter insurgents, they still only dealt with the symptoms. Unless the underlying drivers are addressed, some form of insurgency will emerge again. Typically, as was the case with the ASWJ, insurgents withdraw, outwait the counter-insurgency campaign, probe their operational reach, adapt to their tactics, and then return to continue the insurgency. An enemy-centric COIN approach is thus, at best, a short-term solution. Unless the government in the centre changes its policies and addresses the underlying marginalisation of the communities on the periphery, the country will continue to be destabilised by such insurgencies.

The current pathway developed by the government and international partners still differs in important ways from the recommendations of local experts who have researched Cabo Delgado

for decades, such as the Centre for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University. According to these local experts, the most effective way to address violent extremism in Cabo Delgado would be through a holistic approach that includes prevention, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. These local experts recommended that security operations are essential, but their gains will not be sustainable without investments in governance, basic services, and infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, hospitals, health centres, schools, and markets. The locations chosen by the government for its RPCD initiatives, which focused on the strategically important districts of Palma, specifically the Afungi Peninsula, and Mocímboa da Praia, show that the government opted to focus its efforts on securing natural resource extraction sites. To achieve sustainable development, it is essential to support farmers, agricultural cooperatives, the fishing industry, and other key industries that generate jobs and build the local economy in Cabo Delgado.

The AU peace support operations doctrine and ASF policies, such as the Civilian Dimension Policy Framework, provide for multidimensional peace support operations that can support the kind of people-centred peace operations recommended in both the new generation of insurgency literature and by the local experts in Mozambique.¹⁰⁵

SAMIM was not designed from the outset according to the AU's ASF doctrine and policy frameworks because the ASF doctrine does not provide the tools needed to launch and implement an effective COIN or CT campaign. SADC initially assumed an enemy-centric COIN approach and thus sent a military-only assessment mission that, not surprisingly, presented a military plan to the SADC leadership. The ERM elements were gradually introduced when SAMIM cleared the path for civilian ERM to take place. However, the responsibility for the RPCD was, as mentioned previously, in the hands of the Mozambican authorities. To a large extent, the authorities have limited capacity and/or are unwilling to implement the early recovery tools, which could create the foundations for sustainable peace and stability. The Cabo Delgado province thus mostly did not move beyond the stabilisation phase, militarily and in relation to civilian early recovery measures, into a long-term reconstruction and development phase.

By announcing the move from Scenario 6 to 5, the mission, SADC, and SAMIM tried to move the focus away from an initially needed military kinetic-focused COIN/CT operation into a multidimensional stabilisation effort. However, the transition is complex and did not have the intended impact. As illustrated in the report, the relationship between the host government, the mission, and other international actors reduced the effect of the launched initiatives. The lack of SAMIM and host-nation capacity is a determining factor in the lack of success. The SADC TCCs decided to deploy military forces lacking essential capabilities and capacity to implement the six mandated areas and achieve the four strategic approaches.

105 AU, "Policy framework for the civilian dimension of the African Standby Force", 2021, <https://african-standbycapacity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ASF-Civilian-Dimension-Policy-Framework.pdf>; Cedric de Coning and Yvonne Kasumba, "The Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force", 2010, <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/accord-civilian-dimension-asf-eng-1-.pdf>

SADC repeated this dynamic when, in December 2023, it deployed its SAMIDRC force to North Kivu, DRC, without the needed capacity and specific capabilities to implement its mandate of neutralising the M23 insurgency group. The result has been that the SAMIDRC has suffered significant casualties and has been operationally tied down to its bases. SADC, other RECS, and the AU must learn from these experiences to frame this enemy-centric approach and secure a smooth transition from military stabilisation to the civilian-led and dominated early recovery and stabilisation phase. The complex situation in Cabo Delgado illustrates the challenges of balancing military and non-military efforts in an unstable region. Whether a more integrated approach can enhance effectiveness and achieve sustainable outcomes in resolving the conflict remains to be seen. SAMIM demonstrates how regional and national actors increasingly assume responsibility for security operations, with the AU playing a more limited role as an authoriser. However, the SAMIM case also stresses that the regional capacity, in the case of SADC, is somewhat limited, and the regional entity has found it challenging to deploy and sustain a robust military operation without international and continental funding and support.

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Annexure: EPON project summary

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network produces a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via <https://effectivepeaceops.net>. The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.

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Since October 2017, Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado has been plagued by a violent insurgency led by Ahlu al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah (ASWJ). Since the onset of the violent conflict, approximately 5,000 deaths were recorded, and over half a million persons were internally displaced (IDPs) by end-2024, alongside significant destruction of property, kidnappings and other forms of insecurity.

On June 23, 2021, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) approved the deployment of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), to support the Mozambican government in combating the insurgency. SAMIM was deployed in July 2021 under Scenario 6 of the African Standby Force (ASF) doctrine, allowing for robust military intervention against armed opposition.

In August 2022, the mission's mandate transitioned to Scenario 5 of the ASF doctrine, focusing on a multidimensional peace support operation involving civilian, police, and military components. This shift signalled, at least in principle, a move from a predominantly military approach to a broader mission aimed at supporting the Mozambican government and local stakeholders in stabilising the region.

The study investigates the mandate of SAMIM, why it was deployed, which tools it was given to implement the mandate, and to what extent it fulfilled its mandate.



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