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Protracted war amid Southern African Development Community (SADC) intervention in the Mozambique insurgency

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States in a regional security complex have formed ad hoc missions, which are meant to sidestep the challenges that regional economic communities (RECs) encounter in combating transnational insurgents. Ad hoc missions have made significant tactical gains in combating transnational insurgencies but have failed to achieve a complete victory in several regions of Africa. The paper examines the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), which is fighting Ansar Al-Sunna Islamist insurgents. Findings indicate that a lack of political will at the state level is the most significant contributing factor to the failure of SAMIM to achieve a complete victory over insurgents. This paper recommends that Mozambique must have a heightened political will, which must be demonstrated by committing resources and implementing policies that aim to address the root causes of the insurrection in Cabo Delgado.

Key words: Complete victory, counterinsurgency (COIN), Mozambique, Regional Economic Community (REC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM).

INTRODUCTION

Since October 2017, Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique has been beleaguered by insecurity engendered by the Ansar Al Sunna Islamist insurgents, locally known as Al-Shabaab. The International Crisis Group (2022) found that as of February 2022, the insurgency had claimed more than 3,700 lives and displaced more than 800,000 people in the province. Scholars note that the insurgents began operating transnationally by conducting attacks in the south of Tanzania, where they attacked Mahurunga village and

abducted men and women to carry food to the Mozambique side as well as killing 20 civilians in October 2020 in Mtwara village (Ewi et al., 2022; International Crisis Group, 2022). The insurgents operate in the SADC regional bloc. Ansar Al Sunna became internationalized when it conducted a raid in Palma, killing dozens of people, including foreign nationals, which forced Mozambique to request SADC standby force intervention. Dzinesa (2023) observes that on June 23, 2021, SADC adopted SAMIM, an ad hoc mission under the direct

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auspices of the former, with some SADC member countries, including Rwanda, a non-SADC state. To date, SAMIM and Rwanda have failed to achieve a complete victory.

It is imperative to find out why SAMIM has failed to achieve a complete victory over the Islamist insurgents in Mozambique. RECs encounter several challenges that impede a complete victory over modern transnational insurgents in Africa. To avoid REC's challenges, SAMIM was established specifically to address the Mozambican insurgency. This paper discusses and analyzes how mistrust, a lack of political will, inadequate funding, poor governance, and porous borders and globalization have undermined COIN efforts against Ansar Al Sunna Islamist insurgents in northeastern Mozambique. The paper also examines how SAMIM member states mitigate the challenges to achieve a complete victory. The discussion of the factors should answer the question, which is, why is SAMIM failing to completely counter the Ansar Al Sunna insurgents in Mozambique? This paper begins with the background of the Ansar Al Sunna insurgency and SAMIM. Next, the paper examines SAMIM's response and how the five factors listed earlier impede a complete victory over the insurgency. This case is significant and interesting because, according to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI, 2020, 2024), Mozambique was ranked the 15th most terrorist-affected country in 2020 and the 13th in 2022. However, in 2024, Mozambique was ranked the 15th most terrorist-affected country (Global Terrorism Index 2024), back to the same position where Mozambique was prior to the deployment of SAMIM. Additionally, the insurgency is spreading to other parts of the provinces in Mozambique and is threatening countries such as Malawi and Tanzania.

Theoretical framework

This study employs a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates elements from the regional security complex theory (RSCT) and the concept of political will in international relations to examine the dynamics and outcomes of regional security missions, with a specific focus on SAMIM. RSCT provides a lens through which to understand how states within a geographically bounded region interact, especially in terms of security concerns (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). This theory posits that regional security dynamics are largely determined by the interplay of local threats, states' perceptions of these threats, and their capacity to respond. The concept of political will, on the other hand, is explored in relation to states' commitment to deploying resources, making necessary sacrifices, and sustaining efforts over time to achieve security objectives. This framework allows for a subtlety analysis that goes beyond simplistic explanations of success or failure, focusing instead on the interplay of regional dynamics,

state capacities, and the critical role of political will in shaping outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is rooted in a qualitative approach, involving an extensive review of secondary sources, including academic articles, reports from international organizations, official documents from the SADC and Mozambican government, and news articles. This review gathered comprehensive insights into the operational dynamics of SAMIM, the nature of the insurgency in Mozambique, and the broader regional security implications. Special attention is given to analyzing statements, policies, and actions that reflect the political will of the Mozambican government and its regional partners in addressing the insurgency. Furthermore, this study employs content analysis which examines the discourse surrounding the conflict and the regional response.

This involves identifying recurring themes, narratives, and frames used by various stakeholders to understand how the conflict is perceived and addressed. By doing so, the study has strived to uncover underlying assumptions and biases that may influence the political will of states and the effectiveness of regional security missions. The combination of RSCT and the analysis of political will, supported by a robust qualitative methodology, provides a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of regional security missions like SAMIM.

ANSAR AL SUNNA ISLAMIST INSURGENTS

Ansar Al Sunna insurgents, typically known as Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jama'ah (ASWJ), who call themselves the "people of Sunna and the community," began as an Islamic sect in 2007 in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique (Ewi et al., 2022). Cook (2022) found that the group's Salafist ideology was influenced by Muslims who returned from Islamic studies in East Africa. Other scholars contend that the 2017 Tanzanian crackdown on Islamist extremists in the south of the country led to the escape of some leaders into Mozambique (Van Rentergem, 2022), who proselytized the Salafist teaching in public places and established mosques where the youth were radicalized. The group had multiple clashes with Sufi Muslims who rejected their Salafist Islamic ideology. In 2010, liquefied natural gas (LNG) deposits were discovered around the shores of Cabo Delgado province, which attracted European energy and foreign investors, including the U.S. The government of Mozambique expropriated vast areas of customary land to pave the way for TotalEnergies, a French gas company, and ExxonMobil, a U.S. gas company, to establish multi-billion-dollar LNG projects, which insurgents believe benefit a few elite politicians. Figure 1 shows the map of Mozambique.

Like Boko Haram, the group's objective is to establish a caliphate in Cabo Degado (Gardner, 2021). By 2017, the insurgents grew strong and began to challenge state authorities in Cabo Delgado. Insurgents began their attacks, primarily targeting security forces, in October 2017 by using machetes. Later, after successful attacks



Figure 1. Map of Mozambique.
Source: International Crisis Group (2022).

on security posts, they managed to capture arms and ammunition, which provided an impetus to become a formidable force in the province.

Several scholars have associated the insurgency with endogenous factors such as land expropriation, poverty, unemployment, endemic corruption, political ostracism, socio-economic inequality, and regional inequality between the north and the south, where the south is more developed than the northern part of the country (Hanlon, 2022b; Thamsanga, 2023; Vines, 2020). Other exogenous factors include the foreign influence of other terrorists like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Hanlon (2022a), however, observes that the Mozambican President, Nyusi, dismissed endogenous causes, citing that there are no internal grievances between his government and the people, calling the insurgency an external aggression. Insurgents proselytized to replace the secular and corrupt regime to rally popular support, just like Boko Haram, claiming that only a caliphate under sharia law will emancipate the marginalized and bring fair

wealth sharing.

In the early stages of the insurgency, just like Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB), Ansar Al Sunna recruited through radicalization in mosques and Islamic schools and promised jobs and money to the unemployed and disgruntled youths. The insurgent group has both foreign and local fighters, the former being from Tanzania, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), while the latter are dominant, mostly from within the province. This is probably why Nyusi claims that the conflict is an external aggression. In 2018, Ansar Al Sunna insurgents declared affiliation with the Islamic State in Central Africa Province (ISCAP), which is based in the DRC. Insurgents adopted the recruitment strategies of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and began to engage in forced recruitment, decapitating in public those who refused to join them, especially men, to intimidate and spread fear. Like Boko Haram, the group also recruited through abductions and kidnappings. The insurgent group conducted raids, scorched villages, and

carried out indiscriminate killings.

The insurgent group's funding came from organized criminal activities such as drug trafficking, kidnappings for ransom, illegal mining of gold and rubies, and the selling of ivory and timber (Ewi et al., 2022). ISIS also funded the insurgency in Mozambique (Cook, 2022). Ansar Al Sunna insurgents conducted both sea and land operations. The insurgents used arms looted from the security forces, drones for surveillance, and wore uniforms like those of the Mozambican security forces, making a distinction between insurgents and security forces complex (Cook, 2022). According to Ndebele (2021), insurgents mostly used Chinese-made AK rifles, which they captured from both the Mozambican or Tanzanian local armies and police. He notes that other weapons were obtained from the black-market gun trade (Ndebele, 2021). Insurgents gained a foothold in Mocimboa da Praia, which gave them prowess from which they planned, trained, mobilized resources, and conducted attacks against civilians and security forces to exercise negative control of the gas-rich areas by keeping the security forces at bay. On March 24, 2021, insurgents conducted an offensive in Palma in the north of Mocimboa da Praia, which left dozens of people dead, including foreign nationals, and many others injured and fleeing (Estelle and Darden, 2021a; Sinha, 2021). This was the time the insurgency was internationalized and required intervention by other countries.

SAMIM

SAMIM is an ad hoc mission under the direct auspices of SADC. SADC (2021) notes that SAMIM was deployed on July 15, 2021, "following approval by the Extraordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Maputo, Republic of Mozambique, on June 23, 2021, as a regional response to support the Republic of Mozambique to combat terrorism and acts of violent extremism." SADC is a sixteen-member state regional economic community that was established on August 17, 1992, with the aim of promoting "economic and social development through co-operation and economic integration" (Mapuva and Muyengwa-Mapuva, 2014). SADC established the mission without the endorsement of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) and sought AU endorsement after the fact. Kabede (2022) notes that on January 31, 2022, the PSC retroactively authorized the mission in accordance with Article 7 of the AU Protocol. The AU endorsed the deployment of the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) from 15 July 2021, within the framework of the African Standby Force (ASF), to serve as a regional response to support the Republic of Mozambique to combat terrorism and acts of violent extremism, restore security and law and

order in the affected areas in Cabo Delgado province, as well as provide humanitarian relief to those affected by terrorist activities (Kabede, 2022).

Figure 2 shows the member states of SADC. According to SADC (2021), "SAMIM comprises troops deployment from eight (8) Personnel Contributing Countries from SADC namely, Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, working in collaboration with the Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique (FADM) and other troops deployed to Cabo Delgado to combat acts of terrorism and violent extremism." The headquarters of SAMIM is in Pemba, Mozambique (SADC, 2022a). The force does not have a permanent mission; instead, the headquarters is established in relation to where the ad hoc mission is deployed. Before SAMIM deployed in August 2021, Rwanda had already deployed a month earlier in the strategic gas-rich areas where French Total Energies was constructing a multi-billion-dollar gas project in the Afungi Peninsula, following a bilateral agreement between Kigali and Maputo (Cannon and Donelli, 2022). By November 2021, however, SAMIM forces were lean on the ground, having only about 1,077 troops in the mission area (International Crisis Group, 2022). Other actors in the operational theater include the U.S. and EU members such as Portugal, France, Estonia, etc., who conduct specialized training for Mozambican security forces.

Traditionally, the mission is entirely funded by SADC member states. After exhausting the organic resources that member states had, however, coupled with high levels of inflation, they resorted to the international donor community to help the mission with funds for sustainment. On September 8, 2022, the EU approved €15 million in support for SAMIM (Lusa, 2022a). The AU has, however, not played a major role in supporting the sub-regional bloc other than authorizing the mandate.

THE GOVERNMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE AND SAMIM'S RESPONSE

To understand the dynamics of SAMIM's intervention in Cabo Delgado, it is important to comprehend the government of Mozambique's response to the insurgency. Thus, uncovering the phases of government response will unbundle some of the issues associated with the factors that impede transnational COIN efforts in Mozambique. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (2010), define COIN as "comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes." Moore (2007) broadly defines COIN as "an integrated set of political, economic, social, and security measures intended to end and prevent the recurrence of armed violence, create and maintain stable political, economic, and social structures,



Figure 2. SADC Member States.

and resolve the underlying causes of an insurgency in order to establish and sustain the conditions necessary for lasting stability.” The broad definition of COIN by Moore demonstrates how complex it is to successfully conduct such operations. In the early stages of the insurgency, the government responded by deploying the Mozambican national police, who failed to quell the violence. Later, the government resorted to hiring private military companies (PMCs). Ewi et al. (2022) observe that the first mercenary company was the Russian Wagner Group, which deployed in September 2020 and left in November 2020 after suffering heavy casualties. The government struck a deal with other South African PMCs, the Dyck Advisory Group and Paramount Group, which also failed to quell violence in the province (Badzyńska, 2021). Later, the government employed its weak and unprofessional military to quell the violence, but no significant gains were made.

The March 24, 2021 Palma attack that left many foreigners dead was a wakeup call for both Mozambique and the international community to expedite intervention that would defeat the insurgents. Mozambique requested SADC to deploy the standby force and recruited Rwanda as a separate non-SADC troop contributing county (TCC) to quell the insurgency. In May 2022, the head of SAMIM in Cabo Delgado, Professor Mpho Molomo, argued that “security efforts will not be enough to bring stability in the

region until social development issues are resolved” (Hanlon, 2022b). SAMIM is mindful of the need to employ a multidimensional approach to COIN as broadly defined by Moore in his paper titled “The Basics of Insurgency.” The military component of SAMIM has had a substantial impact on creating a platform from which other instruments of national power can be launched. A complete win “involves not only pushing the enemy across his breakpoint and gaining control over one’s political environment, but resolving the underlying social and political factors that gave rise to an organized opposition in the first place” (Freeman and Rothstein, 2011). SAMIM has included a civilian COIN strategy that is being carried out simultaneously with the military forces. For example, in June 2022, SAMIM began to implement peace-building initiatives that are tailored to build the capacity of the police and correctional services, especially in human rights issues (Lusa/SADC, 2022b). The civilian component has embarked on promoting dialogue with community leaders by involving them in decision making that promotes mutual trust between the communities and security forces. There appear to be antagonistic ends between what the Mozambican government promulgates and what SAMIM expects, however. SAMIM understands that the military approach alone cannot bring a complete victory over insurgents in the region. In total contrast, President Nyusi adamantly

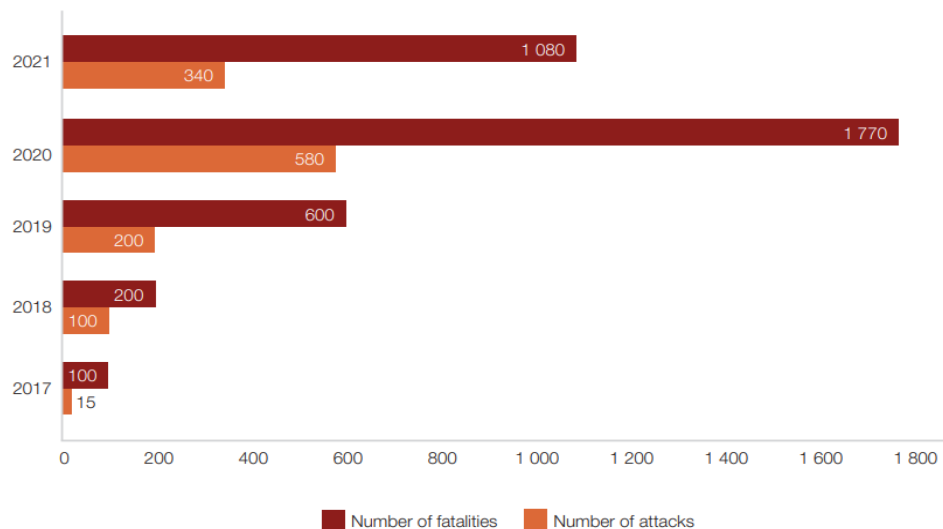


Figure 3. Number of attacks and deaths induced by Ansar Al Sunna Insurgents.
Source: Ewi et al. (2022).

claims the war is an external aggression (Hanlon, 2022b), which is most likely to hamper efforts to address the local grievances.

The AU deployments are categorized into scenarios: Scenario Five is a peacekeeping without robust military action, while Scenario Six is more of an enforcement mission, where military action is at the epicenter of the COIN campaign (Martin and Helfrich, 2022). In August 2021, SAMIM deployed under Scenario Six, in which it conducted offensive military operations to defeat the insurgents. SAMIM is deployed in Macomia and Nangade districts. Since its deployment in August 2021, SAMIM conducted offensive operations alongside Rwandan and Mozambican troops that registered several successes, which are short-term since the security situation is volatile. Such gains include the recapture of territories once held by insurgents, freeing of hostages, killing, and capturing of insurgents, seizure of weapons and ammunition, destruction of many bases, dislodging insurgents and the return of IDPs (Fabricius, 2022; Nhamirre, 2023). In early 2023 and mid-2023, President Nyusi and Kagame assured investors and IDPs that the security situation was back to normal in Cabo Delgado, but in July 2023, insurgents launched an attack against the Mozambican security forces that left eight soldiers dead in Macomia district (Nhamirre, 2023). Like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), an ad hoc mission fighting Boko Haram in the LCB, after each mission, SAMIM claimed victory, but 36 months down the line, a complete victory has not been achieved. Ansar Al Sunna insurgents have adapted and switched to more asymmetric warfare in which they use sporadic ambushes and vehicle improvised explosive devices in

the routine patrol routes of SAMIM.

Figure 3 shows the number of attacks and fatalities induced by insurgents between 2017 and 2021. The deployment of SAMIM reduced fatalities induced by the insurgents. Prior to the deployment of SAMIM in 2021, Mozambique was ranked as the 13th terrorist-hit country, but after the deployment of SAMIM, it was again ranked as the 15th (Global Terrorism Index 2020). The death toll has reduced by nearly 40 percent. Martin and Helfrich (2022) note that in April 2022, the mission sought to shift from Scenario Six to Five, which is a peacekeeping mission without robust military action. In June 2022, however, there was a dramatic twist of events as pockets of insurgents launched deadly attacks against civilians in the districts of Chiure and Mecufi, beheading, burning houses, and displacing over 83,000 people (Martin and Helfrich, 2022).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TROOP STRENGTHS: SAMIM VS. ANSAR AL SUNNA ISLAMIST INSURGENTS

The comparative analysis of troop strengths between SAMIM and the Ansar Al Sunna Islamist insurgents provides a critical insight into the military capabilities of both forces. This analysis is essential for understanding the dynamics of the conflict in Mozambique, particularly in the Cabo Delgado region, where Ansar Al Sunna has been active since around 2017 (Franco and Aju, 2022). SAMIM, established in response to the escalating insurgency in Mozambique, comprises forces from several SADC member states, including South Africa, Tanzania, Angola, and Botswana, among others. The

exact number of troops deployed under SAMIM has varied over time due to the rotational nature of military deployments and the sensitivity of operational details (International Crisis Group, 2022). However, reports suggest that the number has ranged from approximately 1,000 to 3,000 personnel at different times since its inception in 2021. These troops are equipped with a variety of military assets, including infantry units, armored vehicles, and in some cases, air support. The diversity of forces and the support from multiple countries provide SAMIM with a broad range of military capabilities. On the other side, Ansar Al Sunna's troop strength is more difficult to ascertain with precision due to the nature of insurgent groups (International Crisis Group, 2022), which often operate in smaller, more mobile units that can blend into civilian populations. Estimates of the group's size have varied widely, with figures ranging from a few hundred to over a thousand active fighters. The insurgents are known to be well-armed, utilizing a mix of captured military equipment, smuggled weapons, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Their strength lies not in the number of troops or the sophistication of their equipment but in their guerrilla warfare tactics, knowledge of the local terrain, and the ability to strike swiftly and retreat before facing a counterattack. The comparative analysis of troop strengths reveals a complex picture. While SAMIM appears to have a numerical and technological advantage, the effectiveness of these advantages is mitigated by the nature of the conflict. Ansar Al Sunna's guerrilla tactics and deep understanding of the local environment pose significant challenges to SAMIM's conventional military approach. Furthermore, Mlambo and Masuku (2021) note that the insurgents' ability to integrate within local communities complicates SAMIM's operations, as distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants becomes increasingly difficult.

One of the most significant potential successes for SAMIM was the restoration of state sovereignty in areas currently under the control of Ansar Al Sunna. By leveraging its military capabilities and regional support, SAMIM effectively dislodged insurgents from key territories (Ukhami and Doumbia, 2021), thereby reinstating the Mozambican government's authority over these regions. This not only was a symbolic victory but also a practical step towards stabilizing the country. Additionally, with improved security in the region, SAMIM facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need (ADF, 2024). By securing key routes and areas, aid organizations had safer access to deliver food, medical supplies, and other essential services to affected communities. This not only addressed the immediate needs of the population but also supported long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts. On the other hand, Ansar Al Sunna demonstrated a significant capacity for resilience and adaptability in the face of counter-insurgency

efforts. Despite facing a formidable opponent such as SAMIM and other international forces, Ansar Al Sunna has potential avenues for success that stem from both its operational tactics and the socio-political landscape of the region which include, exploitation of local grievances among the population in Cabo Delgado, use of propaganda particularly through social media and other online platforms, and the possibility of receiving external support, in the form of funding, weapons, or strategic guidance (Moshoeshe and Dzinesa, 2024).

THE ROOTS OF THE RENEWED CONFLICT: CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN THE MOZAMBIKAN POST-CIVIL WAR POLITICAL SYSTEM

In contemporary Mozambique, politics is a combination of continuities (Frelimo's long-term domination and Renamo's unchanged leadership) and changes (the emergence of a new opposition party, Frelimo's increasingly apparent corruption, and new rent-seeking strategies regarding natural resources). This tension between consolidated dynamics and new opportunities plays a central role in Renamo's decision to take up arms and resort to its old confrontation strategy with a well-known enemy. According to Regalia (2017), "this old/new conflict reflects Renamo's fear of marginalisation as well as its old leadership style".

Decentralization of power

As the conflict is no longer motivated by an anti-communist stance, Renamo's political agenda has centred on the exercise of power and the distribution of wealth generated by the country's new hydrocarbon industry. Renamo is pushing for greater decentralization of power, asking that provincial governors be elected directly by local population, rather than appointed by the ruling party. The Rome General Peace Accords (GPA), a comprehensive peace agreement that marked the culmination of years of negotiations were signed in Rome on October 4, 1992, by representatives of the Mozambican government and the RENAMO (Buelhoff, n.d). The Accords were instrumental in setting the stage for post-war political reforms. The Accords also addressed the need for decentralization as a means of promoting local governance and political participation. By devolving certain powers to local authorities, the reforms aimed to enhance the responsiveness of the government to the needs of its citizens and to mitigate the centralization of power that had characterized the previous political system.

Transition to a multiparty democracy

Renamo's transition into a peaceful political party after

the 1992 GPA was not as automatic and successful as the lack of conflict for over two decades would have suggested. “Though it managed to adapt its agenda to new economic and social concerns, Afonso Dhlakama’s unchallenged leadership of the party has been seen as a brake to the party’s chances of fully transitioning into a successful political party, although reported electoral irregularities have also contributed to Renamo’s sidelining in the exercise of power” (Regalia, 2017). The 1990 formulation and acceptance of a new constitution, which came before the 1992 peace agreements but was essential to the peace process, helped to ease this transition. The founding of new political parties and the holding of multiparty elections were made possible by the new constitution’s provision of freedom of political association. Recent years have seen Renamo face greater challenges in running for office due to a lack of funding. These challenges may be made worse by an institutional framework that appears to be manipulated in favour of Frelimo and is under its control. Prior to the first general elections in 1994, Renamo had benefited from a US\$17 million UN Trust Fund (Wiegink, 2015). In essence, Renamo’s financial situation deteriorated along with its electoral performance over time.

Renamo’s electoral grievances

Among the most debated issues has been the lack of transparency and the party politics dominating electoral commissions: the vote count and reasons for discarding irregular votes are not always transparently disclosed, and the national electoral commission’s independence from Frelimo has been challenged on numerous occasions, in particular after the 2009 general election (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). “In fact, in February 2014, the Frelimo government reached an agreement with Renamo to double the number of opposition-party representatives within both national and provincial election commissions” (Regalia, 2017). But as long as both parties’ leaders continue to adopt aggressive mindsets from the past, this kind of accord is unlikely to reduce tensions. The relationship between Renamo and Frelimo remains sour. Clashes between Renamo and government forces have overlapped with the insurgency and hindered the Mozambican government’s response in Cabo Delgado (Estelle and Darden, 2021a). There is a high likelihood of Renamo fighters joining the Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado, which will exacerbate the already volatile security situation in the province.

WHY HAS SAMIM FAILED TO COMPLETELY COUNTER ANSAR AL SUNNA INSURGENTS IN CABO DELGADO?

Quarterly extensions of SAMIM indicate that the mission is struggling to achieve a complete victory over Ansar Al

Sunna insurgents in Mozambique. If the mission was achieved, there would be no need for subsequent extensions. Unlike the MNJTF that has been combating Boko Haram for more than a decade, however, as of October 2023, SAMIM’s COIN campaign has lasted for almost 36 months. This section discusses and analyzes how mistrust, a lack of political will, inadequate funding, poor governance, and porous borders and globalization have undermined SAMIM’s efforts in countering Ansar Al Sunna Islamist insurgents in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, and how the mission alleviates these challenges. Findings should help in guiding policy makers on how best to achieve a complete victory over the insurgents in Mozambique.

Mistrust

As a force, SAMIM member states have signaled that they are trustworthy since there is little to no information about untrustworthiness among them. Mistrust between Mozambique and SAMIM rose when the former and Rwanda signed a bilateral agreement that saw 1,000 Rwandan troops deployed in the troubled region of Mozambique before deliberations about the SADC intervention were concluded (Mugabi, 2021). To increase SAMIM’s mistrust, Rwanda was authorized to deploy in the gas-rich Afungi Peninsula in Cabo Delgado, while SADC was deployed in less strategic areas of the province (Cannon and Donelli, 2022). Some analysts “suggest that France might be behind Rwanda’s push into Mozambique, as it seeks to protect a \$20 billion gas field investment by French energy giant Total” (Lawal, 2021). Cannon and Donelli (2022) observe that when Rwandan troops registered tactical gains in the Afungi peninsula, TotalEnergies awarded a Rwandan construction company a contract to clear the site in Afungi, augmenting the realist view of Rwanda. The areas where Rwanda deployed were quickly secured, but the areas remain desolate as some remnants of Ansar Al Sunna insurgents keep conducting asymmetric operations against security forces and civilians in the province.

There is also mistrust between Mozambique and Tanzania. President Nyusi has insisted several times that the conflict is exogenous, citing the influx of Tanzanian and other East African Islamist fighters into Mozambique (Estelle and Darden, 2021a; Hanlon, 2022a). Other Mozambicans believe that Tanzania is fueling the conflict to destabilize the multi-billion-dollar gas projects (Vines, 2020). There are also accusations that Tanzania restricts Mozambican refugees from entering the country to prevent insurgents, who might have mingled with the internally displaced persons (IDPs), from infiltrating into the country. Reports indicate Tanzania forces IDPs to return to Mozambique (Cook, 2022). These accusations are most likely to build mistrust between the two states, considering that Tanzania has deployed its troops in

Nangade district under the banner of SAMIM (International Crisis Group, 2022). Mistrust between Tanzania and Mozambique is less likely to strengthen cooperation. This limits intelligence sharing and will most likely undermine COIN efforts and result in the failure to achieve a complete victory over the insurgents in the region.

Mozambique does not trust other international actors, such as the U.S. and Portugal, who are training the Mozambican security forces. Hanlon (2022a) observes that Mozambique is not happy with the U.S.'s presence in the country because, "before the end of the Cold War, the U.S. waged a proxy war against the then Soviet Union that killed one million Mozambicans." To keep the U.S. at bay, Mozambique only allowed the former's troops for training and not to conduct operations in the troubled region. As for Portugal, a former colonial master, its presence threatens Mozambican sovereignty. Additionally, Hanlon (2022a) observes that when South Africa, a de facto SADC hegemon, offered military intervention in Mozambique before 2021, President Nyusi was reluctant to accept the offer. The unwillingness to accept South Africa's offer was most likely because during the Mozambican Civil War of 1977-1992, beginning in 1980, South Africa supported the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), a political party and a militant group that opposed the ruling FRELIMO party (Cabrita, 2000; Cannon and Donelli, 2022). Such resentments most likely led to inappropriate COIN action that facilitated the growth and spread of the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. This is overstressing troops on the ground to secure the whole province and, hence, resulting in the failure to achieve a complete victory over the insurgents.

To address mistrust, countries ought to signal that they are trustworthy. While mistrust lingers between SAMIM and Mozambique, and the latter with other individual states, the U.S. made it clear that its presence in Mozambique is to counter ISIS, which is posing threats to Africa (Kgosi, 2021) because African countries are poor and can hardly self-sustain protracted COIN operations. Mozambique and the U.S. have embarked on a military exchange program to provide specialized training to the Mozambican military (Van Rentergem, 2022). Van Rentergem (2022) further notes that Mozambique also signed a defense cooperation agreement with Portugal to conduct special operations training. Thus, mistrust slowed COIN response that led to the growth of the insurgency to the levels that have been difficult to eliminate and achieve a complete victory in Cabo Delgado province.

Lack of political will

As a mission, SAMIM and SADC member states have collectively demonstrated a heightened political will to

quell the violence in Mozambique. The mission is formed by eight member states, who have deployed troops and supported the mission with funds and logistics (Campbell, 2022). The heightened political will is observed from calls that SADC member states made to intervene before Mozambique acknowledged in 2019 that it could not manage to neutralize the insurgency. Thus, in a coalition of the willing, political will involves the willingness to conduct military missions to achieve broader political objectives, which include ensuring long-term peace and safety. In his book *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz argued that:

Will is the essential component of military operation. If we desire to defeat the enemy, we must proportion our efforts to his powers of resistance. This is expressed by the product of two factors, which cannot be separate, namely, the sum of available *means* and the *strength* of the will (Clausewitz, 1968).

The strength of the will and the sum of available means are important if nations are to collectively defeat the adversary. Thus, cooperation rests on an individual member state's willingness to commit itself to a military operation. The regional intervention force consists of 3,000 troops from eight SADC member countries: Angola, Botswana, the DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia (Lusa/SADC, 2022b). There is a lack of political will on the part of the government of Mozambique to end the conflict, however, which impedes SAMIM from achieving a complete victory.

The insurgency in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, has highlighted significant challenges in the region, not least of which is the apparent lack of political will from Mozambican authorities to effectively address and counter the threats posed by Ansar Al Sunna insurgents. This deficiency in political commitment has had a profound impact on SAMIM's ability to conduct successful counter-insurgency operations. Several pieces of evidence point towards this lack of political will, which has undermined efforts to restore peace and security in the region.

One of the most telling signs of the lack of political will in Mozambique is the government's initial reluctance to acknowledge the severity and complexity of the insurgency. For years, the Mozambican government downplayed the threat, labeling insurgents as mere criminals rather than recognizing them as a formidable and organized militant group with ties to international jihadist networks. This underestimation delayed the formulation and implementation of an effective counter-strategy, allowing the insurgents to gain ground and strength.

Despite the growing crisis, there has been a noticeable hesitancy on the part of the Mozambican government to fully engage with international partners and accept external assistance. While SAMIM represents a regional effort to support Mozambique, the cooperation and

coordination between Mozambican authorities and SAMIM have been less than optimal. This has been attributed to a desire to maintain sovereignty and control over the response, but it has also limited the effectiveness of SAMIM's operations due to restricted access to critical areas and information.

Many have alleged that the Mozambican government is using the conflict as a way to access land and resources that it otherwise could not control, and as such it has a vested interest in prolonging the conflict rather than resolving it. Mozambique's lack of political will to end the conflict is evidenced in the way it is handling affairs in the conflict region, especially land and IDPs. The Council of Ministers on May 17, 2022, gave to an unknown agency land measuring 12,000 ha (Hanlon, 2022b). As per the regulations in Mozambique, land transfers greater than 10,000 ha require consent from the locals, but because the locals are not available due to the insurgency, the government allocated customary land to the agency without following its own regulations. To exercise total control of the resource-rich land, in the early days on the insurrection, the government did not want to see IDPs returning to their locations (Cook, 2022). The EU and the World Bank expressed interest in providing funds to try to stop the war in the early stages of the insurgency, but Nyusi refused (Hanlon, 2022b), which indicated a heightened lack of political will to end the conflict on the government side. Thus, keeping the IDPs in camps was a strategy adopted by the government of Mozambique to keep landowners away from access and control of their land, and blocking aid to address the core causes of the insurgency was another indicator of not wanting to stem the conflict. Therefore, it is less likely for SAMIM's COIN efforts to be fully supported by the host nation, which contributes to why the ad hoc mission is failing to achieve a complete victory over insurgents in Mozambique. In the first half of 2023, the government of Mozambique called for the return of IDPs, citing the return of normalcy in Cabo Delgado, which many still question considering the fact that militants continue to launch deadly attacks (Nhamirre, 2023).

As the insurgency was growing and spreading, Mozambique's military expenditure increased until 2019 by which time the insurgents had gained a foothold and posed a huge threat. Thereafter, the country reduced its military expenditure by almost a quarter (Cheatham et al., 2022). Furthermore, Cheatham et al. (2022) note that the Mozambican security forces are few, poorly trained, and under-resourced, which undermines the proper and professional execution of joint offensive operations. Thus, much as SAMIM has the political will to end the conflict, the government of Mozambique is not prepared to stop the violence due to a lack of political will to adequately resource the security forces.

SAMIM member states have a heightened political will, mostly likely because it is an ad hoc mission, which is

under the direct auspices of SADC, a sole subregional bloc in southern Africa that is entrusted to enhance cooperation and security. To instill a sense of political will in the Mozambican leadership, the regional bloc keeps on pressuring the Mozambican government to demonstrate political resolve in which addressing the root causes of the insurgency is key. SAMIM acknowledges that the military approach alone will not end the conflict should Mozambique's leadership fail to address the endogenous causes of the insurrection (Ntaka, 2023). Thus, the EU pledged millions of dollars to help Mozambique address the endogenous root causes of the insurgency, which is in contrast with President Nyusi's belief that the conflict is influenced by exogenic factors. The insurgency in Mozambique has been politicized such that the way SAMIM sees and plans to address the conflict is different from the way the government sees and wants to address the insurgency. This is likely to lead to poor cooperation and coordination among stakeholders.

Inadequate funding

At the onset of SAMIM, SADC member states funded the mission on a cost-sharing basis through the SADC Peace Fund, which demonstrated commitment to quelling the insurgency in Mozambique. Campbell (2022) found that South Africa was the main funder of the mission. In this sense, SAMIM was able to overcome funding constraints that are typical of RECs and which often curtail regional missions of this type. The funding quickly ran low, however, leading SAMIM to seek external assistance. The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the current global economic crisis that is attributed to the war between Ukraine and Russia, has put SAMIM into a predicament situation of sustaining the mission that has been extended indefinitely. Additionally, some member states of SADC are overstretched as they are also participating in another peacekeeping mission in the DRC under the banner of the UN. Disasters have also limited funding to the force as countries worst hit by floods in 2022 and 2023 had trouble addressing such environmentally induced catastrophes (Fabricius, 2022). Inadequate funding undermines the commitment of resources even when states may have the political will to quell the insurgency. Thus, inadequate funding is preventing SAMIM from increasing its forces and operations to secure the recaptured territories, which leads to a failure to achieve a complete victory over Ansar Al Sunna insurgents.

To address funding problems, SAMIM pledged to pay only mission support allowances (MSA) to troops from the SADC Peace Fund, while foreign deployment troop allowances are shouldered by the TCC (BOPA, 2022).

SAMIM has delayed paying troop MSA due to economic hardships, however, which is most likely to demoralize

troops in combat (BOPA, 2022). Cheatham et al. (2022) note that SAMIM received funds from the EU in support of its deployment in Mozambique. In April 2022, SADC requested donor funds to mitigate the problem of inadequate funding that has negatively affected its operations, and in September 2022, the EU approved €15 million to assist SAMIM in its day-to-day COIN operations in Mozambique (Lusa, 2022). SADC has requested more donor support to help it sustain its operations to achieve a complete COIN campaign in Cabo Delgado.

Poor governance

Poor governance, especially in Mozambique, is a major contributing factor to the failure of SAMIM to achieve a complete victory over Ansar Al Sunna insurgents. The United Nations and World Bank (2018) argue that "a significant proportion of contemporary violent conflicts are rooted in group-based grievances around exclusion that forge deep-seated feelings of injustice and unfairness". Several scholars attribute the insurgency to poor governance in Mozambique, in which many people live in extreme poverty and do not have access to basic services such as schools and hospitals yet claims indicate that the resources that the government uses to develop central and southern Mozambique come from the marginalized northern province of Cabo Delgado. The conflict is politicized such that government authorities do not accept that the insurgency is fueled by local grievances. Failure to define the problem is an indicator of weak or unprofessional government machinery that is entrusted to govern its people. Continued land expropriation by the government will only increase the existing disequilibrium between the state and its people, making it difficult for SAMIM, a force that operates alongside the host nation's forces, to achieve a complete victory over Ansar Al Sunna insurgents.

The estimated level of government effectiveness for Mozambique and its SADC neighbors is as shown in Figure 4. Botswana, a member of SADC with good governance, served as a control when the graphs from the World Bank data were created. Except for Botswana, governance has deteriorated despite hopes for better governance in some of the SADC member states, which is essential in addressing the underlying causes of the insurgency. Insurgents who will later destabilize the entire region are more likely to be harbored by poorly governed nations that border Mozambique. As insurgents escape to other countries, there is a high likelihood that insurgents in these poorly governed countries will recruit more fighters who will either reinforce Ansar Al Sunna in Mozambique or establish other insurgent groups in the region, which will overwhelm the already struggling SAMIM to achieve a complete victory.

Mozambique is one of the most corrupt countries in the SADC region (Figure 5). Corruption impedes the effective functioning of the state. Thus, insurgents can easily infiltrate the corrupt ranks and files of the host nation forces that operate alongside SAMIM forces, which would undermine intelligence collection and planning for targeted attacks. Additionally, elites in severely corrupt countries benefit from goods and services at the expense of the poor, who in turn resort to insurgency to force governments to change for the better. Even when donors fund programs that aim to address the root causes of the insurrection, the possibility of aid trickling to the target audience is low. Specifically for Mozambique, several scholars have observed that resource profits benefit the ruling FRELIMO party elites (Hanlon, 2022b). With widespread corruption, addressing the socio-political grievances will remain a mere rhetoric and will make SAMIM's COIN efforts futile. The situation is very complex as the government does not accept that the insurrection is influenced by endogenous factors such as rampant corruption. Therefore, efforts to address corruption are less likely to be in the government's priorities. In February 2022, the International Crisis Group reported that incidences of extortion by the Mozambican security forces at checkpoints were on the rise (International Crisis Group, 2022), which is most likely undermining SAMIM's COIN efforts as it operates along with the Mozambican national forces.

There have been several reports of human rights violations by the Mozambican security forces in the war-torn region (Cook, 2022; Stanyard et al., 2022). To close the security gap in communities in Cabo Delgado, vigilantes have collaborated with the state forces to fight the insurgents in the region, but because of their lack of professionalism, they have been at the center of accusations of human rights abuses (Estelle and Darden, 2021b). As the mission requires operating with the host nation's forces, locals in the troubled region are less likely to distinguish perpetrators from those who respect human rights, such that SAMIM is most likely to lose popular support, which will limit intelligence collection and eventually fail to engage in targeted attacks against insurgents, which would help in achieving a complete victory over insurgents in Cabo Delgado.

There is little that is written about the governance of SAMIM. The host nation is ill-governed, however, which has ripple effects on SAMIMs' COIN efforts. Ewi et al. (2022) note that "the government's creation in 2020 of the Agency for Integrated Development of the North (ADIN) represented hope for many disenfranchised people in the north and rightly acknowledged the importance of creating economic opportunities as a means of addressing the root causes of the insurgency". Failing to define the cause of the insurgency is preventing the government of Mozambique from narrowing down the scope and taking appropriate measures, however.

Government Effectiveness: Estimate in 2011 and 2021

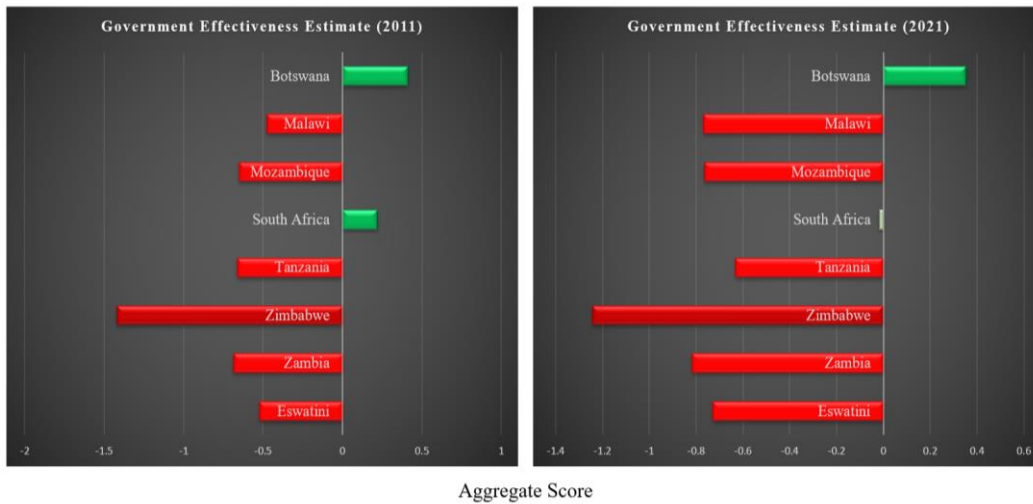


Figure 4. Worldwide governance indicators for SAMIM Member States. Source: World Bank Group (n.d).

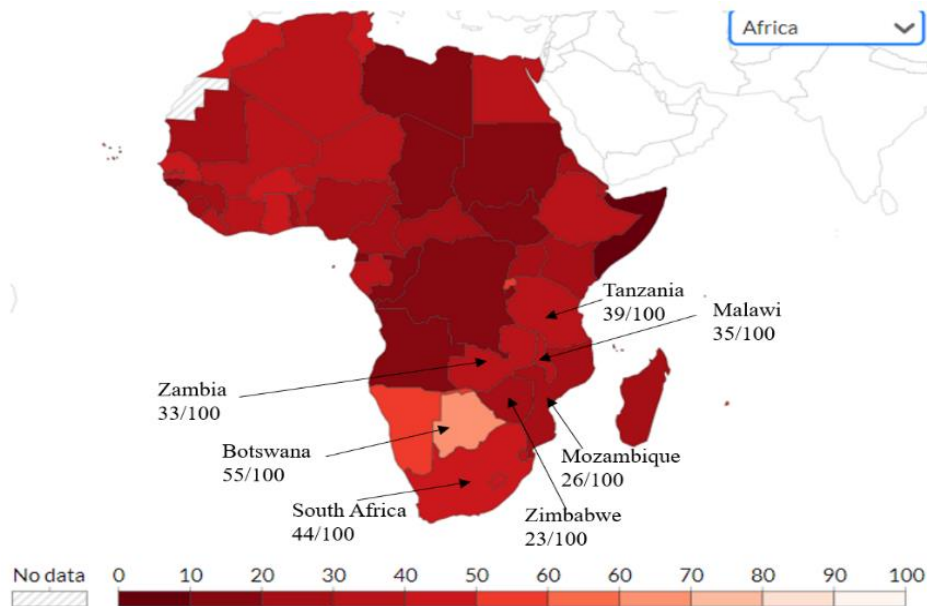


Figure 5. Corruption Perception Index of Some SADC Member States in 2021. Source: Transparency International (2021).

Instead, organizations such as the World Bank are financing the country’s initiative to address the root causes through ADIN (Cook, 2022) in the midst of widespread corruption, from which the target population is less likely to benefit. Lusa (2023) notes that in August 2023, “ghost employees were discovered, most of whom were detected in the education, health and defence, and

security sectors, signifying that the military is not free from rampant corruption. External efforts to address the root causes of the insurgency cannot be effectively implemented to achieve the goals when the leadership of Mozambique does not see endogenous factors as the main causes of the insurgency. Human rights abuses by security forces in the mission are mitigated through

training by the European Union Training Mission (EUTM). According to Borrell (2022), “the EUTM is also providing training on human rights and international humanitarian law, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and relevant UN organizations.” Since SAMIM operates alongside host nation forces, if human rights abuses continue, the ad hoc mission is less likely to achieve a complete victory in Cabo Delgado.

Porous borders and globalization

Porous land borders, especially between Tanzania and Mozambique, have made SAMIM’s COIN efforts difficult to achieve a complete victory over insurgents. Mozambique and Tanzania share a common land border that is not fully policed, and this facilitates the easy movement of foreign fighters from the DRC, Kenya, and Tanzania into and out of Mozambique and the illegal cross-border transfer of arms. The International Crisis Group found that by December 2021, SAMIM claimed to have killed around 200 insurgents of its 3,000-strong fighters (International Crisis Group, 2022). Many foreign fighters escaped the offensive in Mozambique by mingling with the civilian population, while others may have returned to their countries in Kenya, Tanzania, and the DRC. Ewi et al. (2022) found that some of the insurgents’ base camps were commanded and managed by foreign nationals from Tanzania, Kenya, and the DRC. The DRC’s eastern region is home to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), who are affiliated with ISIS (Candland et al., 2021). Stanyard et al. (2022) note that the ADF insurgent group, which is part of ISCAP, provides basic and specialized training in bomb-making and acts as a rear base for Ansar Al Sunna insurgents. ADF has adapted to the UN peace enforcement operations and is most likely to infiltrate its fighters into Mozambique to launch a protracted insurgency campaign so that SAMIM will be overwhelmed and fail to achieve a complete victory. To the east of Cabo Delgado are several islands, which insurgents have attacked by using boats and canoes to obtain food and medical resupplies. Even though SAMIM and Rwandan forces have maritime components, their deployment and patrolling have been limited due to logistical challenges. The February 1, 2022, attack on Matema Island left two civilians killed, villages burned down, and shops looted. Unfortunately, SAMIM was slow to reach the area of the attack by both air and boat.

The mission of SAMIM to counter the insurgency of Ansar Al Sunna in Cabo Delgado has been a complex endeavor, significantly influenced by the multifaceted nature of globalization, which has contributed to the challenges faced by SAMIM, ranging from the spread of extremist ideologies and the international arms trade to global financial networks and the involvement of foreign

fighters. Globalization, characterized by increased connectivity and the rapid exchange of information, facilitated in the spread of extremist ideologies (Columbo et al., 2021). The internet and social media platforms enabled groups like Ansar Al Sunna to access jihadist propaganda, adopt radical interpretations of Islam, and forge ideological links with global jihadist movements. Social media is a significant tool through which extremists have expressed grievances, mobilized resources, and recruited potential fighters (United Nations and World Bank, 2018). This digital connectivity not only facilitated the radicalization process but also allowed Ansar Al Sunna to project their narrative beyond their immediate geographical confines, appealing to a broader audience and potential recruits. In Cabo Delgado, the discovery of vast natural gas reserves attracted international investment and attention (Cabo Delgado, 2024). However, the local population saw little benefit from this wealth, leading to feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement. Ansar Al Sunna capitalized on these grievances, positioning themselves as champions of the local Muslim population against what they portrayed as a corrupt, neglectful state and exploitative international interests. This narrative resonated with many, particularly the youth, who faced high unemployment and limited opportunities.

CONCLUSION

SAMIM, alongside Rwandan troops, deployed to counter the insurgency in Cabo Delgado in August 2021, but to date, the mission has failed to achieve a complete victory amid several short-term gains. Ansar Al Sunna insurgents grew in strength and controlled parts of the strategic areas of Mocimboa da Praia, Palma, and Pemba in Cabo Delgado. SADC member states have demonstrated a heightened political will as the mission is directly supported by SADC. Political will was demonstrated when the REC made calls to intervene, and upon Mozambique’s authorization, the mission quickly moved into the theater of operation with organic resources before the AU PSC approved the mission. SADC and SAMIM have also urged Mozambique to address the root causes of the insurgency. Furthermore, the mission is focused on acquiring more donor funds to sustain the mission, which could facilitate sustainment and maintenance of momentum to achieve a complete victory over the insurgency.

Most issues that require addressing fall on the leadership of Mozambique, which has demonstrated a distinct lack of political will and poor governance. The regional response cannot overcome this critical challenge. President Nyusi’s claims that the insurgency is driven by external factors have undermined the government’s commitment to address the underlying grievances that

are associated with the insurrection. Additionally, the delayed acceptance of intervention by SADC when the insurgency was still in inception created a conducive environment for the group to grow, spread, and become strong, which made it difficult for the SAMIM to deploy in all parts of the insurgency. The hiring of PMCs did not help Mozambique at all. The deployment of Rwandan forces in strategic areas, while SAMIM forces were deployed in less vital areas, created mistrust between SAMIM and the host nation. Human rights abuses by the Mozambican military may tarnish the image of SAMIM as these security actors operate alongside each other. Of the five factors that impede SAMIM's efforts to achieve a complete victory over Islamist fighters in the province, lack of political will and poor governance on the part of the host nation greatly impede COIN efforts by SAMIM to achieve a complete victory. Thus, Mozambique is grounded on the military approach to quell the insurrection, which has already proved to be counterproductive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mozambican political leaders must commit resources to addressing the root causes of the insurgencies through all instruments of national power, the most passive ones being economic, diplomatic, and information. States must understand that insurgencies are centered on the population, which means that as military operations are in progress, host nations must rally natural support by eliminating the preconditions for an insurgency. Once disequilibrium between the state and society is eliminated, the insurgent's infrastructure will be easily identified, as the same people will be vital in providing accurate information about insurgents, which will facilitate targeted attacks against them. Mozambique must strive to strengthen its institutions, such as the military, which acts as a deterrent to would-be insurgents, and economic institutions that aim at alleviating poverty. The country must be committed to fighting corruption that is weakening the effectiveness of government institutions. COIN forces must always retain initiative when using the same approach against the insurgents. According to Arreguin-Toft's (2001) strategic interaction model, COIN forces win when they use the same approaches as the insurgents, such as a direct attack against a directly defended insurgent force and an indirect attack against an indirectly defended insurgent force. Modern insurgents, just like the Mozambican insurgents, are quick to adapt to changes on the battlefield that avoid the COIN force power advantage. COIN forces must be flexible and quick to adopt changes in strategies as dictated by the situation and the environment. The nature of COIN in Mozambique overwhelmingly rests on the military components of SAMIM and the former. Even though the military approach has failed to achieve

complete success in countering modern transnational insurgents in Mozambique, kinetic action creates a secure and conducive environment in which non-kinetic efforts in COIN can be facilitated. COIN forces must amass adequate human and material resources that enable the maintenance of speed and momentum to degrade the insurgents' freedom of maneuver.

At the regional level, states must find mechanisms to iron out disputes and suspicion so that they collectively work together. Thus, collaboration and cooperation among SAMIM member states and the host nation are vital in strengthening coalitions, which enhances the exchange of information and intelligence. SADC must continue to fully support SAMIM, which operates within their geographical space, by generating protocols and mechanisms that are instrumental in COIN. The implementation of protocols and programs agreed upon by member states must be collective. Otherwise, because insurgents flow like water, the weakest will form a breeding ground for insurgents that will terrorize the whole southern region in the future.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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