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Actor Profile: SADC Mission in Mozambique

Cabo Ligado — or ‘connected cape’ — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and MediaFax.

INTRODUCTION

The Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) was first deployed in mid-2021 and is set to end on 15 July 2024. SAMIM has operated, for the most part, parallel to the Rwandan Security Forces (RSF), deployed at the same time. The RSF deployment has since 2021 been Mozambique’s preferred support mechanism, and the country only reluctantly accepted Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) intervention. Throughout its three-year term, relations with the host country have been strained, while operational cooperation with the RSF has been limited.

Political constraints arising from tensions with the host country were compounded by SAMIM’s own internal issues. The bloc had little experience of managing such interventions, while member states’ willingness to commit troops, materiel, and budget to the exercise has always limited the mission’s potential.

This profile uses ACLED data and other sources to examine the effectiveness of SAMIM’s deployment against Islamic State Mozambique (ISM), and its relationship with RSF, Mozambique’s Defense and Security Forces, and the Tanzanian People’s Defence Force (TPDF). SAMIM has had some success, particularly in Nangade district, but also obvious failure elsewhere, particularly in Macomia district, where ISM remains entrenched. It notes that this failure needs to be shared between all state forces operating in that area. It concludes by identifying the gaps that will be left behind following the completion of its mission and identifying ways these are likely to be addressed.

ORIGINS

SADC first expressed its willingness to support Mozambique in Cabo Delgado in May 2020.¹ The SADC Standby Force Mission, as SAMIM was originally called, was not approved until 23 June 2021, while the formal agreement with Mozambique on deployment was not completed until 16 July 2021.² By then, the RSF had already started to deploy and had [secured the site](#) of a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Palma district. The delays in approval, agreement with Mozambique, and the first deployment, particularly when compared to the speed of the RSF deployment, were indicative of Mozambique’s reluctance to accept SADC intervention and of structural issues concerning SADC’s Standby Force mechanisms.

By April 2021, one year after the possibility was first formally raised, SADC was still at the stage of expressing concern and support when it finally agreed to send an assessment mission to the province, which visited

1. SADC, ‘Communique of the Extraordinary Organ Troika Plus the Republic of Mozambique Summit of Heads of State and Government,’ 19 May 2020.

2. SADC, ‘Communique of the Extraordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government, 23rd June, 2021,’ 23 June 2023; SADC, ‘SADC Executive Secretary Presents Instruments of Authority for Standby Force Deployment Mission to Mozambique.,’ 16 July 2021.

from 15-21 April.³ SADC did not meet again until 27 May to discuss options. In the meantime, President Filipe Nyusi went to Kigali to meet with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and to Paris to meet with President Emmanuel Macron and TotalEnergies Chief Executive Officer Paul Pouyanné. French firm TotalEnergies' had declared *force majeure* on the LNG project in April, so France, Mozambique, and TotalEnergies had a shared concern in restoring a level of security that would allow the project to restart. In Kigali, Nyusi and Kagame discussed Rwanda's experience in the Central African Republic alongside a United Nations force, and President Nyusi expressed his interest in Rwandan support in Cabo Delgado.⁴ The RSF was on the ground in Palma just 10 weeks after Nyusi met with President Kagame in April, indicating that Rwandan intervention was the preferred option for Mozambique.

Approval of the SADC intervention came more slowly. Heads of state did not consider the SADC fact-finding mission of April until 27 May. Unwillingness on the part of Mozambique likely explains the comparative speed at which each arrangement was finalized. Structural issues within SADC may also have explained it. While the mechanisms for the Standby Force have been in place since 2007, political structures have worked against its effective mobilization and deployment. These include the varying forms of political settlement of member countries, relationships between member states, and their relationships with neighboring states, as well as issues such as force interoperability and procurement.⁵ Some of these issues would become apparent during SAMIM's deployment in Cabo Delgado.

DEPLOYMENT

The April 2021 fact-finding mission's assessment recommended an ambitious deployment of 2,916 troops. The recommendations included three infantry battalions, a special forces squadron, surveillance aircraft, a submarine, two ships, and six helicopters. In reality, SAMIM never deployed such capacity. At its formal launch in Pemba in August 2021, just 738 soldiers and 19 civilian experts had been deployed. The two largest troop-contributing countries at that stage were Tanzania and South Africa, with 277 and 270 troops, respectively. Botswana, at that point, had contributed 108 troops, Lesotho 70, and Angola just 16.⁶ Other contributing countries include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, and Zambia.⁷

MISSION

Though now in Mozambique for over two and a half years, SAMIM has always operated within a short-term horizon, and without clarity on the end state that would trigger the end of the mission. There has also been a lack of clarity concerning the doctrine underpinning its operations and its relationships with other forces, particularly the RSF.

SAMIM's initial mandate was for just six months. In January 2022, it was extended for three months and for a further year in August 2022. A further one-year extension was then made "with a view to a phased drawdown."⁸ A leaked document indicated that this would be completed by 15 July 2024.

The Status of Force Agreement signed in July 2021 described SAMIM's mandate as supporting Mozambique to "combat actors of terrorism and violent extremism by neutralizing the threat and restoring security in order to create a secure environment." Neither the Status of Forces Agreement nor further public

3. [SADC, 'Communique of the Extraordinary Double Troika Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community \(SADC\),' 8 April 2021](#)

4. ['Ataques em Cabo Delgado: PR Nyusi no Ruanda para colher experiências,' Carta de Mocambique, 30 April 2021](#)

5. [Rashia Phofuetsil. 'SADC Standby Force Intervention Capability: challenges to operational deployment,' 2019, Canadian Forces College](#)

6. ['Missão da SADC em Cabo Delgado inicia com 738 soldados e 19 peritos,' Carta de Mocambique, 10 August 2021](#)

7. [SADC, 'SADC Mission in Mozambique \(SAMIM\) in Brief,' 10 November 2021](#)

8. [Communiqué of the 43rd Ordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government, 1st August 2023,' SADC, 17 August 2023](#)

pronouncements expanded on SAMIM's strategic doctrine. With the bulk of forces from four different countries and limited experience in operating the SADC Standby Force mechanism, this was perhaps inevitable. The only hint of their approach was a commitment to move from peace enforcement operations, known as Scenario 6, to peace support operations, Scenario 5. While this shift came in April 2022 during a downturn in ISM operations, there was no significant change in SAMIM posture, such as a move towards supporting policing, for example.⁹

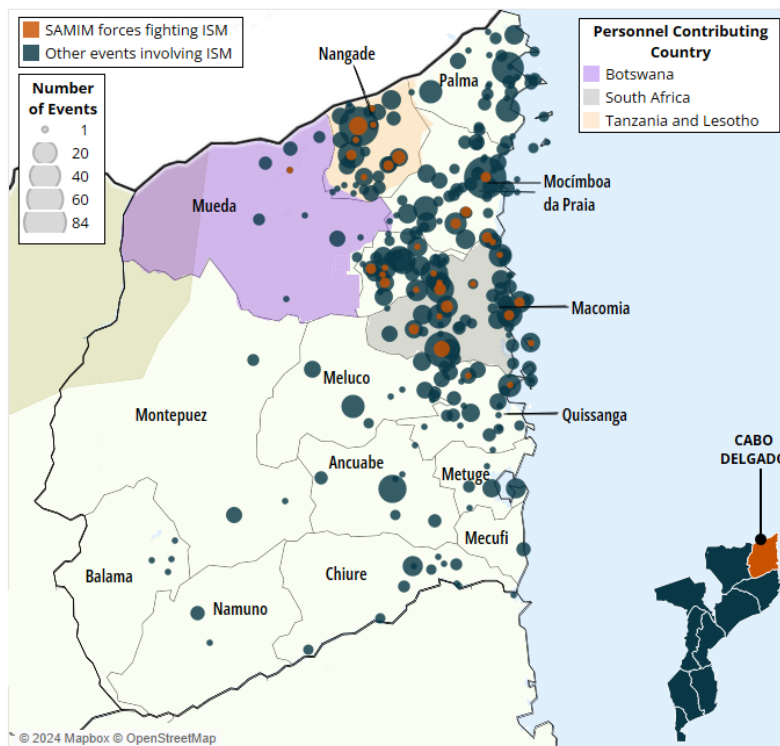
Another notable feature of the Status of Forces Agreement is the absence of any mention of the RSF, either directly, or indirectly as a friendly force. Consequently, in the main body of the Status of Forces Agreement -- annexes were unavailable -- there is no mention of coordination mechanisms other than with the Defense Armed Forces of Mozambique (FADM).

OPERATIONS

SAMIM forces were deployed across northern Mocímboa da Praia but away from the centers of RSF operations in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia districts. Troops from Tanzania and Lesotho were deployed to the Nangade district, bordering Tanzania. Botswana troops have been based in Mueda district, with a remit to cover Muidumbe district also. The South African contingent was deployed to Macomia district. Since October 2022, a separate TPDF contingent has been deployed in Nangade district under the terms of a [bilateral agreement](#) signed in September 2022.

ACLED records just 67 political violence events involving SAMIM forces from August 2021 to December 2023, with none recorded since. These events were concentrated in Macomia (24) and Nangade (22) districts (see map below).

**Political Violence Involving ISM
and SAMIM Forces in Cabo Delgado**
August 2021 - December 2023



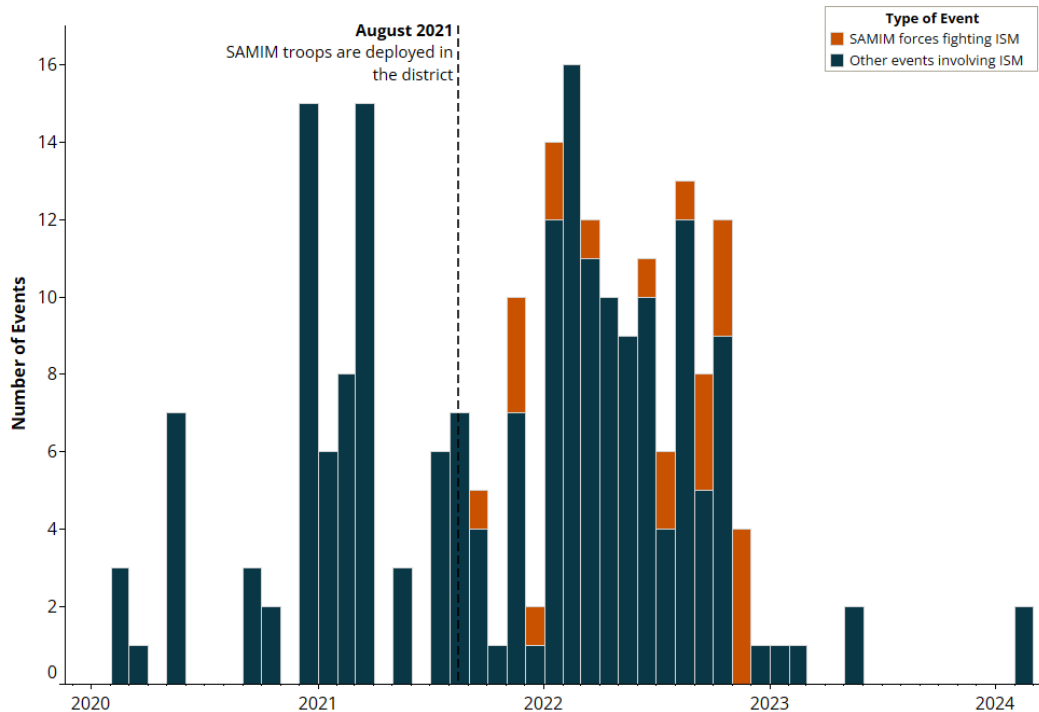
9. Guy Martin and Kim Helfrich, 'SAMIM deployment extended and mandate altered,' Defence Web, 4 April 2022

The low number of combined operations likely reflected the political and structural constraints that SAMIM has faced. Finance has been a significant factor. Under the terms of the operation, Personnel Contributing Countries (PCC) were to cover costs to sustain troops in the field, but not all PCCs were able to do so, with SADC itself drawing almost five million US dollars from its contingency and reserve funds, according to an internal SADC report.

These financial constraints were compounded by a seeming lack of cooperation from the Mozambican authorities from the start. For example, the SAMIM headquarters in Pemba was never fenced, while a lack of office space at the headquarters necessitated the Head of Mission to work from his hotel room, according to SADC. Operationally, the FADM, SAMIM, and the RSF also failed to routinely share intelligence, likely reflecting the lack of political support for the mission from Mozambique and contributing to the low level of operations overall and of joint operations in particular.

Despite the low number of recorded events overall, SAMIM has had some success in Nangade, the district in which it was most active. In May 2022, approximately 60 insurgent fighters [gave themselves up](#) to Tanzanian troops on one occasion and local authorities on another. Meanwhile, intense joint operations with Mozambican forces in November of that year successfully [targeted ISM hideouts](#) in the district, leading to the death, surrender, or flight of ISM fighters. SAMIM's success over that time can be seen in the reduction of ISM activity in the district. ISM was involved in 116 incidents in Nangade in 2022 according to ACLED data. In 2023, this fell to just four. In 2024, there have been two minor incidents in the district up to mid-March.

Political Violence Involving ISM and SAMIM Forces in Nangade January 2020 - March 2024



SAMIM has been less successful in Macomia district, where South African troops have been deployed. ACLED records SAMIM activity targeting ISM strongholds in the north of the district around Chai Administrative Post area, as well as on the coast around Mucojo, with activity from 2021 to mid-2023. The extended activity of SAMIM in these areas reflects the importance of the Macomia coast and Catupa forest to ISM, despite a relatively limited number of violent incidents involving SAMIM. SAMIM was involved in just 24 political violence events across the district from September 2021 to the end of 2023. In the same period, the poorly trained and ill-equipped Local Force militia in northern Macomia district alone were involved in 22 such events, according to ACLED data. While the joint efforts of SAMIM, the RSF, and Mozambican forces, including Local Force were met with a significant reduction in ISM activity in the district, they have failed to contain the insurgency in the same manner as in Nangade. ACLED records ISM involvement in 13 events in the district in 2024. This was a significant reduction from 2023, with over 42 events, but considerably higher than Nangade. The situation has not improved since, with the rate of ISM activity in Macomia to mid-April 2024 remaining slightly higher than the rate for 2023.

Perhaps not surprisingly, ISM has managed to maintain a presence in both Catupa forest in northern Macomia, southeast of Chai village, and along the coast, particularly between Mucojo and Quiterajo villages. In operations in Macomia and in southern Mocímboa, SAMIM has collaborated with the RSF and FADM. This has seen SAMIM engage in aspects of Operation Golpe Duro that [targeted ISM sites in Catupa forest](#) and [with FADM on the Macomia coast](#). The latter operations led to the death of ISM's operational commander, [Bonomade Omar Machude](#) near Quiterajo in August 2023. However, unlike in Nangade district, ISM remains entrenched in Catupa forest and has retained considerable freedom of movement along Macomia's coastal strip.

Success in Nangade can partly be explained by Tanzania's interest in addressing ISM activity along its border. Tanzania's primary concern, as expressed by President Samia Suluhu Hassan in [January 2024](#), is that the problem does not spill over the border. This partly explained the deployment of TPDF under a bilateral agreement with Mozambique, as well as the strong military presence on the Tanzanian side of the border. But she also pointed out that the deployment was also due to the presence of a "foreign force which is along our border" - an obvious reference to RSF's presence in Palma district.

Mistrust between RSF, SAMIM, and Mozambique partly explains the lack of success in Macomia. It should also be noted that the approach adopted by SAMIM's South African contingent was not well adapted to counter-insurgency work. According to a SADC review of the mission, the force was reliant on mounted patrols, unwilling to engage in "in-depth operations where terrorists hide." Additionally, Macomia, particularly the coast, is an area where ISM has relatively good relations with communities that are not generally supportive of the ruling Frelimo party and where Local Forces have [consequently not developed](#).¹⁰

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The scheduled termination of SAMIM on 15 July 2024, presents some risk to Mozambique and to the two remaining forces, the TPDF, and the RSF. At the same time, it presents ISM with some opportunity. FADM and the Police of the Republic of Mozambique remain ill-equipped to fill the gap that will be left by SAMIM. The Local Forces, which since December 2023 have been under the command of FADM, will remain a significant auxiliary force in areas where they are established, such as northern Macomia district, Nangade, Muidumbe, and Mueda districts.

Mozambique's preferred solution is to rely on the bilateral deployments of the RSF and TPDF. This presents risks to both forces. Since 2022, the RSF has adopted a markedly defensive posture, focusing on security

10. Tom Gould, Tomás Queface, and Fernando Lima, 'The Islamic State in Mozambique: The Cabo Delgado Conflict since 2021,' The Hudson Institute, 20 February 2024

around Palma and Mocímboa da Praia towns, and securing the main routes in the north of the province. Expanding operations will mean engaging in areas where ISM has some demonstrated support, such as in coastal Macomia, and runs the risk of killing or injuring civilians during operations. The RSF will also be under pressure from Mozambique to not repeat the mistake of SAMIM, of “avoiding in-depth operations where terrorists hide.”

The TPDF is unlikely to stray far from the border with Tanzania in Nangade district. Its concern is to prevent spillover into Tanzania’s southern regions. The main risk it faces is maintaining a positive operational relationship with the RSF, despite their forces being on [opposite sides of the conflict](#) in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo. Tanzania is part of the SADC Mission in DRC, which is in conflict with the Rwanda-backed [M23 Movement](#).

For ISM, SAMIM’s withdrawal represents an opportunity to build on recent operations. Operations in Chiure, Ancuabe, Mecufi, and Metuge districts in the province’s south in the first quarter of 2023, and its return to Nampula province in April 2024 revealed significant gaps in security coverage. The final withdrawal of SAMIM will stretch all state forces -- Mozambican, Rwandan, and Tanzanian -- across the province. Consequently, ISM movements will become less predictable, while key targets such as district towns like Macomia, and infrastructure such as the N380 highway will become more vulnerable. In this context, the possibility of either revised bilateral agreements or even the return of private military contractors cannot be ruled out.