

Southern African Development Community application of Collective Security Against Al Sunnah Terrorists in Mozambique (2015 - 2021)

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Abstract

Beginning on October 5, 2017, Al Sunnah militants in the Cabo Delgado region of Mozambique violently attacked security personnel, governmental buildings, and the civilian public and by 2020 the terrorists had killed more than 3,000 people and driven almost 800,000 people from their homes. The terrorists were also starting to spill over into neighboring nations creating a regional security threat. The Mozambique security forces reacted to the situation without success as the reaction force was underequipped and lacked the necessary skills. As the situation further worsened, Mozambique requested the Southern African Development Community for assistance on the basis of the group's collective security provisions. This culminated in the deployment of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). This study aims at evaluating the collective defense capacity-building initiatives adopted by SADC to assist Mozambique. The study uses a qualitative approach with data gathered through document analysis and interviews of 15 purposely selected informants comprised of military officers directly involved in the conflict, academics and key politicians. Collective security initiatives adopted by SADC include diplomatic involvement, training, offensive military operations, the provision of military gear, guidance, funding, consulting services, and intelligence services. The outcomes show that, despite certain difficulties, the collective initiatives by SADC member states were sufficient to achieve the desired end state of neutralizing the Al Sunnah terrorists and restoring peace and security to Cabo Delgado Province.

Keywords: *Collective Security, Defence Capacity Building, Terrorism*

INTRODUCTION

Rosario et al. (2021) claim that Mozambique's rebel problem has developed over many years, at least since the country's independence in 1975. Cabo Delgado Province, while having abundant natural resources, is nevertheless one of the least developed provinces in the nation and has a sizable underground economy. This was partly a result of the government of Mozambique being sidetracked by a protracted civil conflict and exploitative public policies which exploited the province's resources to develop other provinces. Efforts by local leadership to engage the central government proved futile and this led to frustration and heightened public discontent. As a result, the terrorist organization Ansar al-Sunnah was founded in 2007 to oppose the province's economic marginalization and over time, it grew bigger and more aggressive with the intention of establishing an independent Islamic State in Mozambique.

The Ansar al-Sunnah terrorists began carrying out brutal attacks on security personnel, government buildings, and the general public on October 5, 2017. Attacks on police stations, the theft of weapons, gruesome executions, and the seizure of the town of Mocimboa da Praia are a few of these (Daily Maverick, October 27, 2017). By 2020, the terrorists had killed more than 3,000 people, driven almost 800,000 people from their homes to seek refuge in other provinces or across the borders into neighboring Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Businesses in the area were forced to shut down, and a \$20 billion Total LNG project was suspended indefinitely and this had a negative impact on the national economy (Akinola Olojo, and Phoebe Donnelly: May 12, 2021).

In response the Mozambique Government deployed a rapid reaction force comprised of police and military special forces. However, due to a variety of reasons which include lack of equipment, inadequate skills in antiterrorism operations, inappropriate strategies and a demoralized workforce among others, the rapid reaction force failed to neutralize the terrorists. After 4 years of failure which saw the terrorist strength and area of influence expanding the Government of Mozambique requested for assistance from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as provided for under Article 11(4) of the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security. The SADC Protocols obliges member states to collectively assist a member state upon request when the member fails to protect its population under a collective security arrangement, however, a significant flaw in the SADC framework is the lack of a standing reaction force and established guidelines governing the nature, scope, suitability, and length of support expected from each member state (Bariyo, Steinhauer, and Faucon: March 27, 2021). Resultantly, each member state determines the extent of assistance to provide, and some may even decide to abstain. Without well-defined capacity building parameters, it is impossible to draw informed assumptions about the type, scope, effectiveness, timeliness, and length of member state assistance. Also, there is no assurance that the support provided will be suitable, sufficient, timely, etc. In response to Mozambique's request for assistance SADC deployed an ad hoc multinational force, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). Thus, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the ad hoc military assistance collectively provided by SAMIM and assess its impacts on the terrorist situation in Cabo Delgado Province of Mozambique.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research used the descriptive qualitative approach in order to analyze and derive in-depth meaning from the phenomenon in relation to its natural context and enable the researcher to understand the issue from the participant's perspective. The approach enabled the researcher to develop case appropriate techniques to gather and evaluate specific and situational data to the problem under investigation. However, due to travel limitations arising from COVID 19 restrictions and the unstable security situation in Mozambique, the researcher could not conduct observatory research thereby relied heavily on in-person interviews and document analysis. Purposive sampling method was used to choose fifteen informants for the study comprised of academics, political experts in the field and senior military officers directly involved in the conflict. Data validity was achieved through triangulation of research methods and the sources of data. The data collected was thematically managed and analyzed according to the Interactive Analysis Model for Qualitative Data proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mozambique's Reaction to the Terrorist Outbreak

The Mozambique government sent out a specialized rapid response unit, the *Unidade Intervenção Rápida*, bolstered by the military, the Rapid Reaction Unit, Mozambique Republic Police, and the National Criminal Investigative Services to conduct counterinsurgency operations in response to the Al Sunnah terrorist,s violence in Cabo Delgado (Guy Martin: 3 Nov 2022). Unfortunately, the reaction force was underequipped, undertrained, and operating with low morale since the government had been persuaded by external pressure from the developed world to put economic development ahead of the development of defense capabilities. They thus sustained significant losses, and as a result, they began to refuse

operating in terrorist strongholds like Mocimboa da Praia (Burkarti & Munasinghe: 2020). In order to avoid international scrutiny and accountability, the Mozambique government adopted a denialist stance by downplaying the severity of the issue and characterizing the attacks as an imaginary foreign plot intended to smear the government and increase its exploitation. While the terrorists continued to gain territory and power, Mozambique was hesitant to accept or request military assistance from its SADC colleagues until the situation had gotten out of hand (Makonye: 2020).

According to Baptista and Kajjo (2020) the authorities chose private security companies instead and 200 men of the Russian Wagner group were contracted in September 2019 to help and train Mozambique forces in Cabo Delgado. During its initial deployment, the group sustained a number of casualties, however, after sustaining horrific losses in November 2019, it was ultimately forced to withdraw from the area. Despite this horrible incident, Maputo continued with its plan and contracted the South African Dyck Advisory Group in April 2020. The group later became well-known for its performance following an attack in Palma in March 2021. The operation was judged big success, although the contract ultimately came to an end in April 2021. Thus, SADC's involvement was unavoidable given that Mozambique lacked the military personnel, intelligence, tactics, equipment, training, and capabilities required to restrict and neutralize the terrorists. The decision to invite SADC involvement was heavily influenced by the concern that, if the terrorist problem wasn't quickly solved, it would spread throughout the entire region. The terrorist situation could also indirectly destabilize regional peace and security by increasing the number of refugees, upsetting supply networks, causing famine and poverty, violating human rights, etc.

On May 19, 2020, during the SADC Extra-Ordinary Organ Troika Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Harare, Zimbabwe, the Government of Mozambique requested assistance and support from SADC, abandoning its policy of suspicion and lack of faith in regional military intervention after three years of failing to neutralize the Al Sunnah. According to the SADC Mutual Defense Agreement, SADC suggested the deployment of a combined SADC mission comprised of air, land, and naval capabilities (SADC, 2022). It is interesting to note that the SADC member states fall under the international classification of small power nations which are characterized by limited national capacities and resources to pursue their national interests both at internal and international (Abo Lila: 2017).

Collective Action by SADC

The SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), which deployed in Cabo Delgado on July 15, 2021, was authorized by the Extraordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government on June 23, 2021, in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, as a regional response to help the Republic of Mozambique combat violent extremism and terrorism. SAMIM's mandate upon deployment included assisting the Republic of Mozambique in combating terrorism and violent extremism in Cabo Delgado by removing the threat of terrorism and restoring security to create a secure environment, enhancing and maintaining peace and security, restoring law and order in the province's affected areas, and assisting the Republic of Mozambique, in collaboration with humanitarian organizations, to continue providing humanitarian aid (SADC. Int: November, 10, 2021). Since then, SAMIM's mandate has shifted from Scenario Six, a military enforcement mandate, to Scenario Five, a peacekeeping mandate, in accordance with African Union standards; nevertheless, the number of soldiers did not drop as a result. This entailed a shift of scope from being a purely military operation to a "multi-dimensional mission" incorporating integrated efforts after reestablishing peace and security in the Cabo Delgado province covering a broad range of initiatives including applying military, civilian, law enforcement, and correctional service components to the northern Mozambican province that has been under Al-Sunnah attack since 2017 (Guy Martin: 3rd Nov 2022).

To support Mozambique's reconstruction plan for Cabo Delgado, the peacekeeping mandate outlines a number of tactical actions that must be performed to rebuild the Province's infrastructure, public services, and socioeconomic recovery. The strategy outlines measures designed to win back public trust in order to provide secure living conditions. Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) capacity building focused on youth entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and capacity building for the police and correctional services in order to meet the objectives of the Reconstruction Plan. Employees of ERM have taken humanitarian action to try and bring northern Mozambique back to normal (Mangwiro: September 07, 2022).

Out of a membership of 16 states, only 8 deployed troops in Cabo Delgado and these are South Africa, Malawi, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Botswana, United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia. The other member states provided logistics, finance, advise, and other supporting services without physically deploying troops. On initial deployment on July 15, 2021, SAMIM comprised of 2,916 soldiers, four military helicopters, two surface patrol ships, one submarine, one maritime surveillance aircraft, two special forces squadrons, and support personnel. Prior to the deployment of SAMIM, on July 9, 2021, Rwanda—a non-SADC member—deployed 1,000 troops to assist Mozambique in battling terrorism (SADC.INT: November, 10, 2021). Given the magnitude of the mission, the extent of the operational region, and the nature of low intensity activities, which need a lot of manpower, it may be said that there was not enough manpower to effectively impact the entire operational area. This compromised the effectiveness of missions like patrols and follow-ups, as well as the relief system, leading to battlefield fatigue. It may also prove a challenge for battlefield relief, especially given the current operational circumstances, where the mission's mandate has been repeatedly extended and is now indefinite.

As a regional fast response force with a mandate under Scenario 6 of the African Standby Force to combat violent extremism and terrorism, SAMIM's deployment was initially planned to last three months. However, the mandate was extended in August 2022, extending it by a year and de-escalating the intervention from scenario 6 to scenario 5, which changed the focus of the mission to peacebuilding initiatives in support of the Mozambican government's Cabo Delgado reconstruction plan. As a result, SAMIM was now concentrating on rehabilitating and reintegrating both the disarmed terrorists and the previously impacted population into society. Initiatives under this phase includes providing social services including fresh water, medical facilities, roads, and schools, counseling, reuniting shattered families, and reconstructing wrecked homes and infrastructure among others. This was in accordance with the provisions of anti-terrorism and Theory of Peace principles, which emphasize recognizing, understanding and addressing the root causes of conflict as a means of resolving any dispute. They were also involved in the development of income-generating projects to provide the populace with financial empowerment as well as to solve the underlying problem of the terrorist outbreak. After the root reasons have been identified, action can be taken to address them before the conflict can be resolved. Without addressing the conflict's core causes, efforts to resolve it will not result in long-lasting peace and security; instead, they will just temporarily repress the issue, which will subsequently reappear (One Earth Future: 2019).

The majority of the research informants agreed that the SADC intervention saved the security situation in Cabo Delgado from total collapse by restoring peace and security. Hence, the operation was deemed timely from a military perspective. However, from a human rights perspective the intervention was delayed as a result of rigid procedures and procedural requirements, such as the SADC mandatory statutory provisions that the affected member state must formally request for aid and the obligation to first exhaust diplomatic channels before the collective community intervenes. Hence it was only after the murder, injury, displacement, and maltreatment of tens of thousands of innocent civilians and destruction of property worth

millions that intervention was made. Families were split up, their means of subsistence were destroyed, and social, administrative, and governance structures were rendered inoperable. Much of this devastation, death and human suffering could have been avoided had the SADC force interfered earlier. In accordance with its goals as outlined in the Protocol on politics, defense, and security cooperation, SADC should have acted with authority to force Mozambique to accept assistance at an early stage.

According to Kunaka (2022) the major setback for SAMIM was the fact that individual member states were largely responsible for financing their respective contingencies' operations from their national budgets. Such a plan does not promote collective security because poor countries, which may have the manpower, may not be able to participate owing to financial restrictions. As a result, it can be noted that South Africa, the region's economic superpower, provided more than half of the intervention force. Preferably, such operations should be entirely supported by a dedicated SADC fund to provide a more accommodating scenario for all member states regardless of national resource status. To promote national resilience, member nations should allocate more money for defense in their budgets. This will help their defense industries grow. National security should be a top priority since it is the decisive factor in economic, political, social, and other forms of development. Without security, none of the other fundamental basic needs for human survival can be guaranteed.

Outcomes of SADC Collective Action against Al Sunnah Terrorist Group

Since 2017, the Mozambique security forces has been at battle with Al Sunnah and the terrorists were gaining territory. The security forces had suffered significant losses, and they were beginning to suffer battlefield fatigue and lose the morale to sustain the operation. The situation was further exacerbated by shortages of manpower and critical resources such as ammunition and rations. Thus, the SADC intervention force provided practically everything that the Mozambiquan security forces were lacking, including fresh troops, expertise on counter insurgent operations, logistics, technology, equipment, and morale. This provided the locals forces with the chance for capacity building by increasing their operational capability. When SAMIM deployed, the security forces gained battlefield superiority over the terrorists and began recording victories. The SADC mission restored peace and security in the province within a year of its presence, whereas Mozambique security forces had failed to do so in its four years of operations.

A nation's defense capability can be determined by the standard and level of local safety and security. Thus, the quality and standard of security and safety are directly dependent on defense capacity and national resilience. The deterioration of security levels and quality in Cabo Delgado over the time as a result of the terrorist breakout in 2017 until the SAMIM intervention was significant. The general populace of Cabo Delgado were victims of terrorist crimes and lived in perpetual fear of being attacked at any moment. More than three thousand people had died while nearly a million had been displaced, and they had fled the province in search of safety. Due to the paralysis of fundamental service delivery, social life had been severely impacted. The security forces of Mozambique were unable to restore peace and security by eliminating the terrorist threat, which had a direct influence on the social standards within the Province (Macondzo: 2022).

As a result, the SADC's collective security initiative played a crucial role in raising and restoring security levels in Mozambique in particular and the Southern Africa region in general. It can also be argued that SAMIM's all-encompassing strategy, which addressed military, social, political, and economic dimensions of security, was essential to securing the restoration of stability. The Mozambique national and local government machinery had concentrated on military operations disregarding the social needs, which contributed to their failure as they created conditions favorable for terrorist expansion within the disgruntled

populace. Instead of taking a comprehensive response to the problem, the government prioritized military action, which made the situation worse for the general public while promoting the terrorist group's ability to spread its ideology.

The decrease in terrorist atrocities was the most notable result of SADC collective action in Mozambique. A large number of terrorists were killed or captured, and this had a significant impact on the local population. Since then, social life has nearly returned to normal, and individuals can go about their daily lives without dread. Also, there has been a notable improvement in regional development and local governance issues. Instead of limiting their efforts to combating terrorism, SADC forces have also been involved in grassroots development and wellness initiatives, such as offering medical services, rehabilitating infrastructure, starting community economic projects, and offering consultation and advice to the local authorities on a variety of matters aimed at improving the standards of life for the local community. The central government has also become more involved in support of SADC measures, and this has helped to solve the underlying issues that led to the terrorist outbreak. Thus, the restoration of peace and security in Cabo Delgado can be cited as a determining indicator of the effective application of collective security by SADC.

Challenges Encountered by SADC

The SADC mission experienced financial challenges as individual nations were expected to fund their respective contingents from national budgets. As the operation was an emergency which had not been budgeted for, this proved difficult for the small power states and explains why some failed to contribute towards the mission. For example, consider South Africa, which deployed special forces and equipment with an initial budget of R984 million to cover six months of operations. The South African contingent encountered financial challenges when the mandate was extended and the mission was prolonged because the government had no budgeted for the extended period. Budgetary restrictions directly affected the quantity of troops and equipment provided because they pose a serious sustainability problem. The SADC's contribution to the Mission of less than USD 13 million is a substantial departure from the mission's total budget, which was estimated at USD 35 million. The budget disparity worsened as a result of the extension of the mission's mandate, in addition to the logistical challenges the operation was already facing. As a result, reports of ammunition shortages and other logistical needs throughout the operation have been made. (Guy Martin: November 3, 2022).

The majority of SADC member states lack operational independent defense industries, which forces governments to depend on imports for almost all military requirements. As a result, equipment and logistics shortages were experienced during the operation in Mozambique as imports of defense equipment take time to process. This also has a significant effect on respective national resilience, efficacy, and efficiency and can be linked to lower levels of development, lack of resources, outdated technology, and financial restrictions. Only South Africa currently has a competitive defense industry within the Southern African region. Hence, it can be argued that the Mozambique security apparatus could have successfully neutralized the terrorists without the need for foreign capacity building if it had been adequately resourced.

CONCLUSION

The application of collective security enabled the nations of Southern Africa to deal with a terrorist threat to regional peace and security in the form of Al Sunnah terrorist group. The member states of SADC deployed the SAMIM mission comprised in support of the

Mozambique security forces. The SADC member states have taken joint security measures in support of Mozambique, including diplomatic engagement, training, the deployment of military forces for SAMIM combat operations, as well as the provision of military equipment, advice, funding, consultancy services, and intelligence. The initiatives were largely successful and helped Mozambique accomplish its desired goal of neutralizing the Al Sunnah terrorists and reestablishing peace and security in the affected Cabo Delgado area. The regional grouping was able to overcome resource and financial limitations and achieve its objectives despite some of these issues. It is suggested that SADC member states should invest more in developing their defense industries in order to ensure national resilience as a foundation for effective collective security.

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