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ADDRESSING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: CABO DELGADO

RECs Spotlight: Tracking Africa's
Peace Through a Regional Lens

Anthoni Van Nieuwkerk

BACKGROUND

The 16-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) was established in 1980 as an anti-apartheid, pro-development platform called the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), transformed into a development community in 1992.¹ The transformation was triggered by the democratisation of South Africa, with expectations of progress with regional stability, development, and democracy.

SADC pursues its vision and mission by way of its Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030 and Vision 2050. The ultimate objective is to deepen integration and accelerate poverty eradication. Peace and security cooperation forms one of the Plan's four priority areas.

Southern Africa is experiencing an upsurge in violent extremism (VE).² VE refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious, or sociopolitical goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence. Attacks have taken place in the DRC, Mozambique, and Tanzania, with events in the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique being the most challenging and disconcerting. In 2021, after numerous delays and false starts, including relying on private security companies, the Mozambican government finally agreed to undertake a stabilization mission in cooperation with SADC, aimed at countering the activities of the Islamist extremist movement Al Sunna wa Jama'ah, also known as Ansar al-Sunna. The SADC Mission to Mozambique (SAMIM) has since been deployed to the area.³ At its core, stabilization seeks to achieve the strategic goals of transforming acute or imminent violent conflict into a political arrangement that permits nonviolent conflict management. However, at the same time the Mozambican government has invited the Rwandese military to help counter Ansar al-Sunna's activities. A range of outside interests from the European Union to the United States train and equip Mozambican military forces to undertake kinetic military operations, provision of security to local population and training of local security actors to fight insurgents.

SADC is familiar with undertaking military interventions in the Southern African region as a precursor to mediation. It did so in Lesotho (several times since 1997), the DRC, Madagascar, Comoros and Mozambique. Apart from the Eastern DRC, where SADC participates in a UN peace enforcement operation to combat rebel movements, this is the first time SADC is confronted by a conflict characterized as violent extremism or terrorism.⁴

Although military interventions may help to limit violent attacks, they cannot bring sustainable peace. This requires dealing with the complex socio-economic, political, and security factors that enable extremist groups to operate. To avoid the spread of VE throughout the region, SADC and its member states need to develop their own responses to events in their own territories.

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- 1 SADC member states include Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and the four Indian Ocean Island States of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles.
 - 2 This policy brief draws in part on the recent work of members of the Southern African Defence and Security Management (SADSEM) network. See Anthoni van Nieuwkerk, Lucy Shule and Stephen Buchanan-Clarke (eds) *African Perspectives on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* (FES and SADSEM, Maputo, 2023). Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mosambik/20438.pdf>
 - 3 SADC (2021). *SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in Brief*. Accessed at <https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-mission-mozambique-samim-brief>
 - 4 Fabricius, P (2020) 'Reinventing the Force Intervention Brigade', *ISS Today*. Accessed at <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/reinventing-the-force-intervention-brigade>

ANALYSIS AND OPINION SECTION

The questions that arise are what impact the SAMIM deployment has been able to make, what the expectations are for peace, stability and development following the SADC withdrawal from Cabo Delgado, and what lessons this intervention holds for the rest of SADC and other Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

SAMIM's Impact

SAMIM has helped to stabilize Mozambique, a country with a long history of civil strife, now battling VE. SAMIM's mandate evolved from an initial military intervention to a focus on multidimensional peace. While ultimate success is still not guaranteed, SAMIM has bought the Mozambican government time to work at attaining durable and sustainable peace in its northern province.

The role of the SADC Standby Force cannot be overemphasised. Regional peace and security depend on effective preventive and corrective measures such as undertaken by the SADC Standby Force.⁵ However, the state of readiness of the SADC Standby Force is determined by a combination of factors such as the availability of equipment, trained personnel, easy mobilization procedures, and practised or exercised contingency peace support operation measures. This can be achieved through the collective support of member states, the African Union, and international cooperating partners. An effective and impactful SADC Standby Force is vital for realizing SADC's vision 2050.

Future Prospects

Following the relative stability created by SAMIM, the Mozambican government moved fast to create a range of strategies and projects to deal with the socio-economic impact of VE in Cabo Delgado. These include the creation, in 2020, of the Northern Integral Development Agency (known as ADIN) to boost economic development in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula and promote job creation for young people, as a way of discouraging them from joining VE groups. In 2021, the government instructed the National Fund for Sustainable Development with coordinating projects for the recovery of Cabo Delgado, in partnership with ADIN. Another key actor engaged in humanitarian assistance is the National Institute for Disaster Risk Management and Reduction, tasked with implementing the Internally Displaced Management Policy and Strategy. These interventions suggest that the Mozambican government has accepted that the solution to VE in Cabo Delgado involves the adoption of multisectoral, multidimensional and multilateral approaches. However, it seems that these various projects are not integrated into a single strategy, resulting in a wide range of dispersed and uncoordinated initiatives and projects.

Lessons for SADC and other RECs

Mozambique and SADC have been combating VE with a hard military or counterterrorism approach. Whilst extremely important, this approach has not considered the many causes, drivers and triggers that have made it possible for Ansar al-Sunna to take root in Cabo Delgado. The military or security approach is a one-dimensional solution to a complex problem. Even addressing socio-economic issues are unlikely to resolve problems related to incitement to hatred, religious manipulation, revenge attacks following the civil war, and other non-economic problems associated with radicalisation and VE. Moreover, these approaches place more emphasis on donor support, making them subject to foreign manipulation. The USA and EU were quick to offer 'train and equip' type support, which forms part of the Western counterinsurgency or counterterrorism philosophy, which failed

⁵ Apart from the 1992 treaty, SADC's decision-making on deployment of peace missions is informed by a range of documents including 2001 Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation; 2003 Mutual Defence Pact; 2010 Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ; Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-30; SADC Vision 2050; ASF Policy Framework; and AU Agenda 2063.

spectacularly in Afghanistan and in West Africa, particularly Nigeria and Mali.

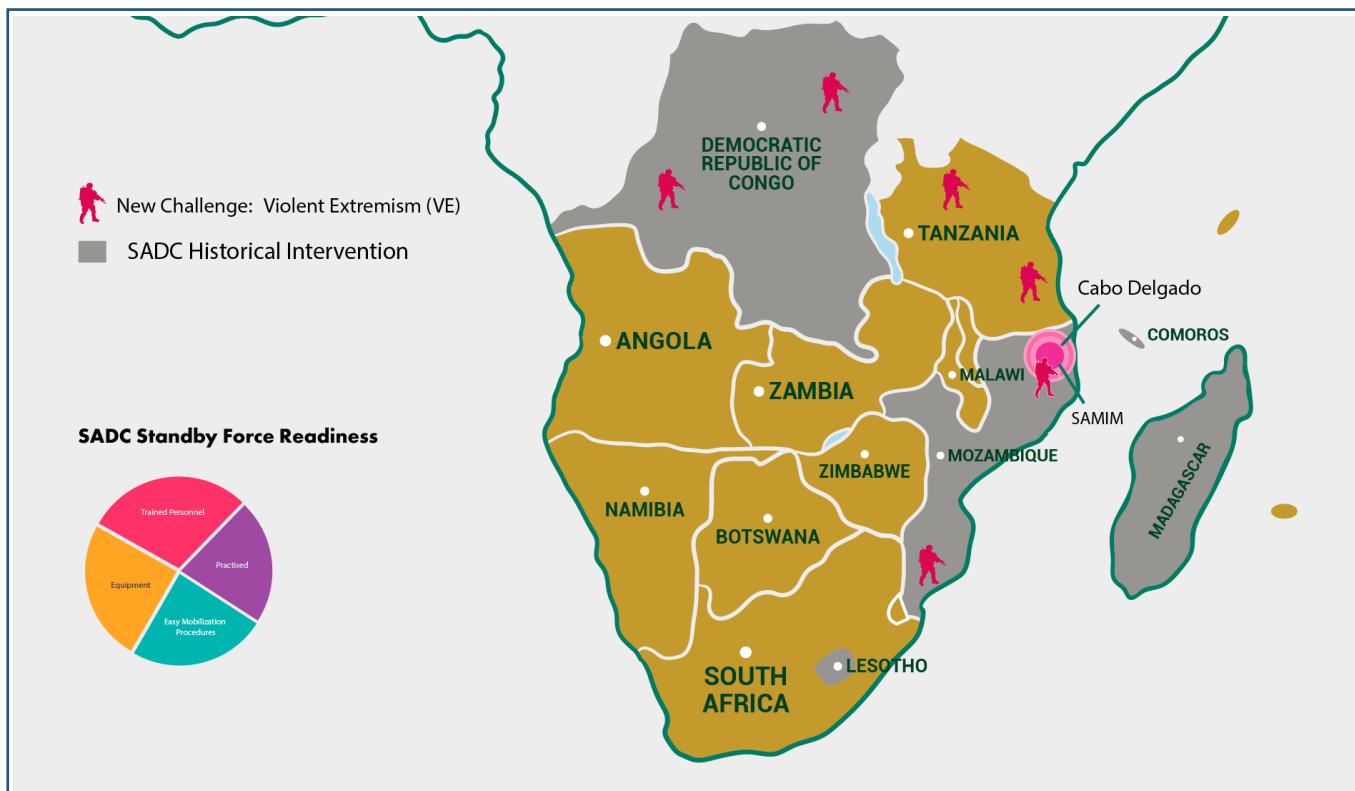
In order to address the deeper causes of violent extremism, changes can be made at three levels. The first is at the public policy and development strategy level, aimed at reducing regional imbalances. ADIN, if implemented with care and sensitivity, can reverse regional imbalances in development and poverty alleviation prospects. The second is at the governance level, aimed at bringing political actors together and providing space for participative governance. The recent municipal election results in Maputo demonstrate the level of democratic fragility and society's need for trusted political institutions and processes. Election management training and public education campaigns can make a positive difference. The third is at the level of interreligious dialogue.

Regarding SADC, in 2022 it established the Framework for Support to the Government of Mozambique in Addressing Terrorism.⁶ This mechanism ought to engage with the AU Policy Framework on Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) and the PCRD Centre.

SADC should take the lead in developing a regional strategy on the prevention and countering of VE and terrorism. This should result in member states developing their own strategies. SADC ought to work more closely with the AU and other RECs, as well as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This is because VE threats are cross-border in nature, and recruits come from both SADC and non-SADC regions. However SADC also needs to address the longstanding challenge of sustainable financing for peacebuilding initiatives.

Ultimately, SADC and its member states need to ask to what extent has there been cross-learning and sharing of experiences from ongoing PCVE operations elsewhere in Africa, and in particular in the Sahel. Preparing such an exercise, either via SADC or the AU, working with experts in the academic and civil society space, could offer important lessons at both the strategic and tactical levels.

⁶ The mechanism encompasses the thematic areas of Politics and Diplomacy; Economic, Social Development and Humanitarian Assistance; Military, Information, and Intelligence; as well as Public Security, Law and Order.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthoni Van Nieuwkerk is a Professor in International and Diplomacy Studies at the Thabo Mbeki African School of Public and International Affairs at the University of South Africa.



IPSS

Institute for Peace
& Security Studies
Addis Ababa University

Addis Ababa University
ppP.O.Box: 1176
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

T + 251 (1) 11 245 660
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