

How does the withdrawal of SAMIM affect AU's engagement in the Conflict in Northern Mozambique?

How does the withdrawal of SAMIM affect AU's engagement in the Conflict in Northern Mozambique? Date | 15 July 2024

Tefesehet Hailu
Researcher, Amani Africa

Today 15 July marks the date for the official completion of the exit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). It is to be recalled that the 43rd Ordinary Summit of SADC held on 17 August 2023 [decided](#) to withdraw the SAMIM starting from 15 December 2023, although the mission's withdrawal [officially](#) started on 5 April 2024.

SAMIM's deployment came after the extraordinary SADC session held on 23 June 2021, which [recognised](#) the need for regional intervention in response to the escalating insurgency by the Islamic State of Mozambique (ISM) in the country's Cabo Delgado region. In addition to the multinational SADC deployment, Mozambique also entered into a bilateral arrangement with Rwanda leading to the deployment of 1000 Rwandan forces in July 2021. While the insurgence became overt since 2017, what prompted the deployment of external forces was its expansion including the attack on the port city of Palma in early 2021 leading to the suspension of the significant liquefied natural gas projects involving Total Energies, EXXON and ENI.

While the African Union (AU) noted the threat posed by the situation as reflected in the report of the Peace and Security

Council (PSC) to the AU Assembly in 2020, the situation in northern Mozambique was put on the monthly agenda of the PSC for May 2021. However, it was later [removed](#) from the agenda following an objection from Mozambique. It was the deployment of SAMIM, to which Mozambique acquiesced reluctantly, that brought the matter back to the PSC. Even then, it emerged on the agenda of the PSC six months after the decision for SAMIM's deployment and principally for purposes of endorsing SAMIM's deployment and the Rwandan troops during its [1062nd session](#). The post-facto referral of SAMIM's deployment to the PSC highlighted the lack of involvement of the AU in the decision-making for the deployment of SAMIM troops. This is despite what is provided under Article 13 (6) and (7) of the Peace and Security Council Protocol, which envisages the ASF to be deployed in pursuit of a decision of the PSC and puts the Chairperson of the AU Commission at the top of the chain of command of the ASF.

Even though there was a lack of coordination between the AU and SADC and the bypassing of the AU's role, the AU endorsed the mission within the ASF framework. These initial steps have shaped the AU's involvement throughout SAMIM's deployment. The AU provided logistical support by shipping equipment from the Continental Logistics Base (CLB) to Mozambique in 2022 and 2023. It also facilitated the provision of financial support to SAMIM through AU's EU-funded Early Response Mechanism (ERM) and the EU's European Peace Facility (EPF).

Although the PSC requested regular updates during its 1062nd session in January 2022, it only met once that year and did not meet in 2023. Unsurprisingly, SADC made the decision for the withdrawal of the SAMIM in the same unilateral manner it had deployed the mission with no engagement from the AU.

SADC's decision for a phased drawdown starting from 15 December 2023, with the complete withdrawal to be finalised by 15 July 2024 is premised on the SADC's position that it cannot

run two missions simultaneously. Following the decision for the withdrawal of SAMIM, the Foreign Minister of Mozambique Veronica Macamo [stated](#) that given its budgetary limitations, SADC had opted to prioritise its mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) above SAMIM. She further noted that ‘... and SADC thought that, for Mozambique, if other countries continue to support us with material, including lethal material, we can effectively overcome terrorism’. The decision to withdraw SAMIM thus stemmed from financial limitations and the logistical difficulties of sustaining two missions simultaneously. It is worth recalling that prior to the decision on the withdrawal of SAMIM, SADC adopted the Framework for Support to the Government of Mozambique and a Peacebuilding Support Programme to supplement Mozambique’s Reconstruction Plan for Cabo Delgado (PRCD). This was after the 42nd SADC summit held on 17 August 2022 which decided to ‘de-escalate the intervention from scenario 6 to scenario 5 and subsequently to scenario 4.’

While it has not fully achieved its objectives, the mission, along with the Rwandan troops, has contributed significantly for stabilising the region through neutralising terrorists, recapturing villages, dislodging terrorists from their bases, and seizing weapons and equipment. These efforts have facilitated the creation of conditions for the return of internally displaced persons to their homes and the safer passage of humanitarian aid. [Reported](#) deaths also decreased from 1,100 in 2021 to 644 in October 2022. Furthermore, ISM participated in 11 political violence incidents per month during the first eight months of 2023, a significant decrease from the 36 incidents per month seen in 2022. By August 2023, over 570,000 internally displaced persons had successfully returned to their homes.

Despite these successes, the situation remained precarious. As we pointed out in [the 3 March 2024 edition of *Insights on the PSC*](#), not long after the adoption of the decision on SAMIM’s

withdrawal the insurgent group increased attacks since September 2023. Since January 2024, the ISM expanded its renewed campaign under the 'kill them where you find them' mantra, resulting in an increase in terrorist activities and internal displacement. These attacks have [spread](#) to the Mocímboa da Praia district and neighbouring districts of Palma and Muidumbe, extending to the Mocomia coast and Mecufi. Compared to the 51 attacks claimed by ISM in 2023, the group has already claimed 57 attacks within the first few months of this year. Additionally, a recent [report](#) by ACLED indicates the reestablishment of insurgents on the mainland of Palma district, where the international liquefied natural gas projects are based, for the first time since February 2023. Consequently, as of 15 March, since December 2023 more than 110,000 people have been internally [displaced](#).

Given the resurgence of terrorist attacks, South Africa and Rwanda have reconsidered their deployment strategies. On Rwanda's side, there was no intention of departure but it was recently [announced](#) that Rwanda will deploy another 2500 troops in addition to the 1000 troops that were deployed in 2021. South Africa, a country that was a major troop contributor with almost two-thirds of SAMIM's troops, on the other hand, has announced that few of its troops will remain in Mozambique and 200 will stay up until March 2025. On July 1, the President of Tanzania, Filipe Nyusi, confirmed that Tanzania will maintain its 300-strong force in the northern district of Nangade even after SAMIM's departure.

In view of these developments, the PSC during its March 2024 meeting on the situation, instead of endorsing SADC's decision on the withdrawal of its mission, opted for simply noting the decision. It also requested the sharing of experiences and lessons learned, a comprehensive study and needs assessment, and regular reports and updated briefings from the SADC. The PSC's requests reflect a cautious approach to the situation in northern Mozambique, emphasising the need to prevent the

emergence of a security vacuum after SAMIM's departure. By focusing on reviewing the Mozambican government's progress in preparing to fill the void, the Council underscores the importance of assessing the country's readiness to stabilise itself. This was also indicative that PSC's engagement in any peace and security situation should not depend on and be mediated through regional mechanisms.

Thus, despite the fact that the PSC's engagement in the crisis in Cabo Delgado was mediated through SAMIM, the departure of the SADC mission should not mark the end of the PSC being seized with the situation in Cabo Delgado. Developments in the past months warrant such continuous engagement of the PSC without this being mediated. The upcoming field mission of the PSC to Mozambique scheduled for 29 – 31 July 2024 serves not only as an opportunity for PSC's continuous engagement but also for identifying the ways in which the AU can play a role in the effort for stabilising the Cabo Delgado region, beyond supporting efforts for filling in the vacuum left by the withdrawal of SAMIM. Most notably, during the field mission the PSC can engage national authorities and other local stakeholders in the ways in which the AU can contribute to peacebuilding and reconstruction including through an AU post-conflict reconstruction and development mission.

The content of this article does not represent the views of Amani Africa and reflect only the personal views of the authors who contribute to 'Ideas Indaba'