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Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

*CORRESPONDENCE

Luca Bussotti
✉ labronicus@gmail.com
Ermenegildo Júlio Coimbra
✉ coimbrahermenegildo3@gmail.com

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Struggling the Islamic State in Austral Africa: The SADC military intervention in Cabo Delgado (Mozambique) and its limits

Luca Bussotti^{1,2*} and Ermenegildo Júlio Coimbra^{3*}

¹Post-graduate Program in Sociology and Centre of Advanced Studies, Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil, ²Post-graduate Studies, Technical University of Mozambique, Maputo, Mozambique, ³Faculty of Law, Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique

This article analyses how SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) faced the threat of Islamic terrorism in one of its member states, Mozambique, since October 2017. This research is focused on the SADC strategy for counter-terrorism, having as its main perspective the military intervention, in a permanent dialogue with the political level of decision. The difficulties in organizing the military intervention in Mozambique by SADC demonstrated a lack of “Sadcnnesses” or a common spirit and vision within this organization. In addition, the presence of many other international players on the field runs the risks of turning the conflict into an international clash between the West, led by the United States, and Islamic radicalism, in Mozambique present with Al-Shabaab and ISIS. The results of the SAMIM (SADC Mission in Mozambique) operation have not been satisfactory, and Mozambican people continue to be threatened by the incursions of well-armed and trained terrorist groups. This study used a qualitative approach based on a bibliographical as well as documental analysis of SADC documents and declarations. A comparative perspective with other African cases of a significant presence of terroristic groups helped the authors to better understand the jihadist attacks in Mozambique as well as the merely military approach to fight them.

KEYWORDS

military aid, Mozambican army, SADCnization, political tensions, Al-Shabaab-ISIS

Introduction

The process of construction and consolidation of the state in Africa after the obtaining of political independences was bothered by several internal and external phenomena, such as civil wars, interstate and intra-state wars, ethnic conflicts, as the Rwandan Genocide (Jean, 2006). Religious conflicts (Christians and Muslims) culminated in July 2011 with the secession of Sudan which resulted into Sudan and South Sudan (Ottaway and El-Sadani, 2012). In addition, another phenomenon that disturbs the construction, consolidation and development of any State and that has in Africa a real stage is terrorism. In the work *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict*, the authors identify “terrorism as one of the three global evils” (Bannon and Collier, 2003, p. 2), together with drugs and HIV/AIDS. All these three threats are present in Africa. Classic terroristic groups in Africa are Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab; the first one has its bases in Nigeria, the latter in Somalia. Since 2014 another important radical Islamic group has gained space in Africa: ISCAP (the Islamic State of Central African Province), a Salafi-Jihadist group with its main operational base in Mozambique (locally known as Ansar al-Sunna) which formed a network with the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Uganda rebel movement based in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Makosso and Collinet, 2021). These two movements are distinct, but it is worth remembering the presence of terrorists coming from Eastern Africa and the Great Lakes in Mozambique to sustain the struggle against Mozambican State carried out by

Ansar al-Sunna (Moss, 2020). Since the first attacks in October 2017, several efforts have been made to combat the terror that have settled in Cabo Delgado. The current situation is still not satisfactory, despite the image that the governmental propaganda is giving of it. Attacks now scattered all over Cabo Delgado province and in the north of Nampula province too, where the last attack took place in a Catholic mission in the village of Chipene, Memba district. In this circumstance a Catholic sister has been killed (Carta, 2022). Thus, the population living far away from Total's large gas investments in Afungi is living in a state of permanent risk. The main purpose of this article is to analyse the SADC military intervention in Cabo Delgado province and its contradictions with different partners, starting from the Mozambican government. In terms of methodology, this qualitative study has adopted an historical perspective, considering the case study of terrorism in Mozambique. The main sources used have been institutional documents, political declarations as well as newspapers and websites.

Military intervention in situation of terrorism in Africa: A short overview

Mozambique is not the first case in Africa in which a military force from outside the country targeted by terrorist attacks is called upon to intervene in order to try to stop the advance of groups linked to jihadism.

The case of the Sahel region is perhaps the best known. Indeed, a full-scale war by jihadist groups, such as Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State, against the five states in the region (Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso) and in various circumstances among themselves, has been going on in that region since 2007. Often, local common criminality has used the banner of jihadism to cover its own interests and trafficking, in a logic of transforming local terrorist groups (Global Terrorism Index, 2022). The results of the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region have been bad, as evidenced by the fact that, during 2022, other countries, such as Togo and Benin, became involved in the phenomenon, thus broadening the territorial base of operation of jihadist groups (D'Amato and Baldaro, 2022).

The same argument can be made for Somalia. Here, the predominant group, Al-Shabaab, continues to carry out attacks against civilians, businessmen and local politicians, with a massive presence in Mogadishu and in partial decline in the south of the country (Global Terrorism Index, 2022).

These two examples lead to the need to make a more general point: jihadist-motivated terrorism in Africa is growing stronger. It means that the strategies adopted to date have failed. A quick look at what has been done in these two areas of fundamental importance to contemporary terrorism can also help to understand the current scenario in Mozambique.

France and the United States represent the two countries most committed to fighting terrorism in Africa. France, since 2013, has launched two major operations, one in Mali (Serval Operation), the other in the Sahel (Barkhane Operation). These actions have included direct military intervention by Paris in crisis contexts. On the other hand, the United States has preferred a more indirect tactic: it opened Combined a Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in Djibouti in 2002, spending more than a billion dollars on training, weapons supply, and other military equipment in countries such as Somalia, but also in West Africa, again with poor results (Borges, 2019).

The failure of the French approach is symbolized by the clashes with the Mali government, and the subsequent expulsion of the French ambassador from Bamako in 2022. The inglorious conclusion of Operation Barkhane represents only the logical consequence of an announced failure. The failure, however, is not only France's. The entire European Union must view the fight against terrorism in the Sahel as its own fiasco, which can be explained not only by faulty military tactics (Erforth and Tull, 2022).

The perception that exists in many African countries, especially Francophone ones, is that France- and, by extension, the European Union- still looks at those territories with a colonial perspective. The people of Mali which burn the European Union flag together with the French flag at the conclusion of Operation Barkhane is the very symbol of the distance that now exists between Europeans and local communities (Maliens celebrate French retreat by burning the EU flag, 2022). Political issues like the CFA franc, political inconsistencies between France and the European Union—as in the case of Mali, whose military junta triggered EU sanctions, meanwhile Paris continued to collaborate with it—, the exploration of natural resources seen as Western depredation (the case of Boko Haram, probably, is the most significant in this sense), allowing the formation of a discourse of revindication based on religious values (Thurston, 2016), all these elements are determining the defeat of the European model in the fight against terrorism, and the rapprochement of these countries toward other allies: Russians, in particular, militarily, and Chinese, commercially and strategically.

As for the United States, its general approach toward Africa has been notoriously ambiguous, while the continent, according to many domestic observers (Bruhl, 2022), continues to represent a problem rather than an opportunity. This approach is leaving China and Russia wide latitude. The military strategy of indirect aid toward countries at risk-terrorism also does not seem to have borne good fruit, precisely because of a deficient overall vision regarding the many open issues in Africa.

The weaknesses and ambiguities above described can be found when dealing with the Mozambican case. Here, too, the approach has been—as we will show below—essentially security-based. The first entity to go down this road was the government of Mozambique. As a matter of fact, it described the first attacks as carried out by “armed bandits.” The failure or unwillingness to distinguish between common crime and terrorist-type attacks showing a strong identity and a clear ethnic connotations was the beginning of a tragic lack of comprehension of a phenomenon that had been brooding for years, in the north of the country (Bussotti and Nhaueleque, 2022). This approach has been adopted also in the next phases of the struggle against terrorism in Mozambique. The intervention of Rwanda and SADC armies did not change a perspective based on a military approach, ignoring the deep social, economic and ethnic issues typical of the North of Mozambique. Among them, a particular emphasis has to be given to the land grabbing operated against Makhwa and Kimwane local communities, in favor of Makonde's Frelimo elite as well as international investors (Hanlon, 2022b). The practical distinction, although never declared openly, between a strategic interest for the zones where Total is carrying out its enormous investment in the gas and a modest interest in the other scattered areas of Cabo Delgado Province shows how much this approach has been instrumental to protect the economic interests of the local political elite and of the foreign companies, in detriment of the interests of the local communities. With results like those registered in Somalia as well as in the Sahel.

The SADC intervention in political crises: A short overview

When Mozambique was still in the hangover of the celebration of its Peace Day (4 October), in the early hours of 05 October 2017, the district command of PRM (Police of the Republic of Mozambique) and a border guard company, both in the town of Mocímboa da Praia were the object of a terroristic attack. Simultaneously, another group unloaded fire on a position of Forest Resources Protection agents stationed at the Awasse outpost (PAv), about 45 km from Mocímboa da Praia (Nhantumbo, 2021). Given the ease of mobility found on this day, the group that invaded the district headquarters town of Mocímboa da Praia “retreated to the village Maculo, 35 km to the north, where they set up by hoisting a flag with Arabic writing meaning God is Mighty” (Nhantumbo, 2021, p. 7). It was the beginning of days of terror and destruction in the northern districts of Cabo Delgado province. These initial attacks were followed by another violent event in the main town of Palma, located inland on the coastal area, where the LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) plant and its complementary infrastructures were under construction. This attack, along with the first ones, caused great concern to the government of Mozambique since it is an exclusive area with prospects of economic gains for the country. Despite the alarm caused by the attack on the town of Palma, the government minimized the attacks by calling the perpetrators insurgents, evildoers, among other nomenclatures, repudiating pronouncements, including an ultimatum given in December 2017, “when the General Commander of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique Bernardino Rafael gave the insurgents seven days to surrender. If they did not do so they would be persecuted and treated as terrorists” (Nhantumbo, 2021, p. 7). In this discourse of pure threat, there were also hidden actions of overvaluation of the threat. On the contrary, there was an effort by the government to blame the attacks on a possible “instrumentalization, manipulation and radicalization of young Mozambican Muslims, for actions of terror and destruction against their own State” (Dos Santos, 2020, p. 5). It did not take long for this state version to fall into disuse, evidenced by the increase in attacks, with foreign protagonists who joined the young local terrorists. The violent events gained space. On 23 and 24 March 2020 the headquarters of the districts of Mocímboa da Praia and Quissanga were occupied by terrorists, as well as many other quarters and positions of the Mozambican Armed Forces. However, it was the attack of 24 March 2021 that dictated a real turnaround in the interaction between terrorist attacks and the government response to this form of manifestation of political violence. A full 3 years later the first attack, in a meeting of the National Council for Defense and Security (CNDS) held in May 2020, it was concluded that there were acts of terror carried out by terrorists. Thus, the denomination evolved from insurgents, miscreants to terrorists. The results of these attacks were very serious: the paralysis of the largest investment in Africa of offshore gas exploration by Total¹, about 4,000 deaths and almost 1 million refugees.

The Mozambican government had never thought that significant terrorist actions could take place on its territory, underestimating the threat. Lulled into the illusion of its imperviousness to such scenarios,

continuing to sell the image of a country without ethnic or religious conflicts to the international community, its intelligence, but above all its political class, had other things to think about (Bussotti and Torres, 2020). Even at the regional level, the concerns expressed in some academic circles did not seem to suggest terrorism as a serious threat to the various countries of the SADC area (Mashimbe, 2022). Nevertheless, this risk had already been present in the region for several years. In a 2005 study, for instance, the question was already raised as to which counter-terrorism strategies the SADC would adopt in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (Rifer, 2005).

Indeed, it was only in 2015 that SADC adopted the Counter-Terrorism strategy and only in 2022 it launched its own center against terrorism (SADC, 2022), even though several legal instruments had already been approved since the organization’s foundation. Among them it is worth remembering the 1992 (SADC, 1992, 2001), implemented by the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO), approved on August 26, 2004, in Grand Baie in Mauritius. On these bases SADC member countries should support each other in case of a political crisis or change in the state order. The SADC Common Agenda (as amended in 2009) and the SADC (2003) are two other important instruments for guaranteeing a mutual aid inside SADC region among its member states. In accordance with Vhumbunu (2021), this legal framework had to induce SADC to help Mozambique immediately, much earlier than it did.

This is the starting point for the analysis presented in this study. Why has SADC hesitated all these years to aid one of its member states? Why did it allow groups close to ISIS to set up in Mozambique, reinforcing the initial actions carried out by an incipient Ansar al-Sunna group, composed by Makuwa and Kimwani youths, dissatisfied with President Nyusi’s Makonde-style governance?

The answers to these questions are very complex, and always partial. One of them, not widely considered by the specialists, must be found in the current nature of SADC. SADC is an organization composed by 16 states, established in 1992 and whose leading country is South Africa, which joined it after the end of apartheid in 1994. In the early period of its existence, the SADCC (Southern African Development Coordination Conference, created in 1980 in Lusaka) had a clear objective: to support the anti-apartheid struggle and the liberation of countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia from South African occupation. Once all these objectives had been achieved, first with the Lancaster House Agreements, which brought about the end of Southern Rhodesia and the birth of the new Zimbabwe, led by Robert Mugabe, and then with the end of apartheid in Pretoria in 1994, the organization began a difficult journey of redefining its identity and programme, which even today does not seem to have been achieved. Probably, this is due to the willing to implement a common economic development (through a process of a regional, accelerated integration), however without considering the importance of a political partnership and of shared values (Mapuya and Muyengwa-Mapuya, 2014).

As a matter of fact, every supranational organization has a specific characteristic: it must develop, in addition to a set of legislative arrangements and economic interests, a spirit dictated by common feelings, partly overcoming mere national interests. Each member state must surrender part of its sovereignty in favor of a new political community and a new political and bureaucratic center (Ernst, 1961). To date, this situation has not yet occurred within the SADC. The “Sadcnization” or “Eastafricanization” process is incipient, and national interests and disagreements are the normal situation within

1 Point out that the Mozambican government and partners continue to negotiate for the return of Total which withdrew after the mentioned attack.

SADC member states (Adar et al., 2020). Just to give the example of Mozambique, there are historical border conflicts with countries such as Malawi (which claims the provinces of Niassa, Tete and Zambezia), e-Swatini (which claims the province of Maputo, despite the MacMahon ruling of 1875), and more recently with Tanzania, because of the gas fields is situated on the border of the two countries (Lavieque, 2021). The conclusions of Nathan's book on conflicts within SADC are very significant. The absence of common values, the coexistence of authoritarian with democratic states, and the negative role of small autocratic states such as e-Swatini and Lesotho are all factors that have, over time, blocked the development of a common identity and a better strategic definition. Thus, SADC was defined by this author as a "community of insecurity" (Nathan, 2012).

Another determining factor for SADC's weakness and difficulty in intervening in political and military crises within its member states is the absence of institutions representing its citizens. There is no SADC parliament, but only a mere consultative forum; the SADC tribunal, to which citizens could appeal, was dissolved in 2012 at the request of the then president of Zimbabwe, Mugabe (PSC, 2020).

The history of SADC highlights interventions in member states through peacebuilding operations. Cases like those of Lesotho, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, e-Swatini show the willing of SADC to propose itself as a regional actor; at the same time, in few cases SADC was able to give an acceptable solution to such crises. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) SADC tried to manage militarily a very complex situation.

The military intervention of the SADC in the DRC occurred at two moments: first in 1998, "when Laurent Kabila found himself suffocated by the rebels who opposed him, and who, with the support of Rwanda and Uganda, confronted the local militias and destroyed Kinshasa" (Salomão, 2019, p. 183). Kabila asked for support from the SADC, which sent a military contingent to the DRC. However, there is little data on the financial effort of this intervention. The second moment of SADC's military intervention in the DRC came after the formation of the M-23, a rebel movement that "made up of fragmented former DRC army troops, who under the leadership of Bishop Jean Marie carried out strong and quite lethal attacks, with an epicenter in northern DRC in the Kivu region, again with support from Rwanda" (Salomão, 2019, p. 189). The intensity and persistence of the attacks provided the DRC government with no alternative but to ask SADC for help. This happened at the ordinary meeting of the body's ministerial committee (CMO), held in Pretoria. Here, DRC requested a diplomatic and military intervention, "so it was decided to send a SADC Brigade consisting of two battalions one from Tanzania and the other from South Africa and one more company from Malawi to the border between Rwanda and Eastern DRC" (Salomão, 2019, p. 189).

The SADC military intervention in DRC, was in fact regional project, evidenced by the magnitude and mobilization of resources for that task. Here, in this brief incursion, we have tried to convey the level and experience of SADC in the interaction with conflicts in the region and the military route as a mechanism for tackling the problem. It has also become evident that the type of violence in Mozambique (terrorism) analyzed in this paper differs from previous intervention experiences by SADC. This circumstance represents a challenge to the military intervention mission in Mozambique (SAMIM).

The SADC in Mozambique

The principle established by the Mozambican government regarding the terrorism in Cabo Delgado has been embedded, initially, on the idea that the task of defense and security of the state had to fall to the Mozambicans. This attitude shows that one of the SADC members states, Mozambique, has had strong reservations from the outset about requesting the help of the organization to which it belongs. In addition to the lack of a unified spirit of SADCization, several other factors must be identified, according to some observers, as the reasons why Mozambique opted for a choice that was in many ways incomprehensible: firstly, the Mozambican government immediately insisted on the international conspiracy theory, wanting to conceal the obvious ethnic, political, and economic roots of the conflict (Bussotti and Nhaueleque, 2022). Young people of Makhuwa and Kimwane ethnic groups have been the protagonists of the first attacks at Mocimboa da Praia and Awasse, as well as they continued to fight against a Mozambican State they interpreted as strange and far away from their interests, expectations, and dreams (Mugadi, 2021). Someone theorized that the situation in Cabo Delgado could be interpreted as a new civil war (Aidi, 2022). Such readings have been carefully avoided by the Mozambican government, which did not want to offer an entirely internal, ethnically-based interpretation of the Cabo Delgado conflict. In this respect, Mozambican needs were intertwined with American ones. The US State Department, in fact, in March 2021 had defined the Ansar al-Sunna group as a "foreign terrorist organization" (Aidi, 2022), on the base of the Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. This organization would be the offspring of the Islamic State (ISIS) of Iraq and Syria, which would open an African front through the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in 2019. This front would be composed, in turn, of at least two main groups: one of Rwandan origin, the Allied Democratic Force (ADF), operating mainly in Eastern Congo, and the other, headquartered in Mozambique (ISIS-Mozambique), known as Ansar Al-Sunna, led by Abu Yasir Hassan (U. S. Department of State, 2021).

In addition to the elements just mentioned, which aim at the internationalization of the conflict, attributing a very relative importance to local factors, the United States also pointed out the danger that South Africa itself was running regarding possible terrorist attacks on its territory. A first ISIS cell was reportedly discovered in South Africa in 2016, while in 2020 there would be direct threats from ISIS if Pretoria intervened militarily in the Cabo Delgado conflict (U. S. Department of State, 2020). These analyses have also delayed SADC's intervention, in which Pretoria's contribution is decisive, toward Cabo Delgado, indirectly supporting Maputo's strategy of delaying external aid. As the Britannic Chattam House remembered, "success depend first and foremost on the willingness (much more on the capacity) of corrupt leaders to reform and renew their social contract with citizens" (Aidi, 2022).

Other elements that would have advised Maputo to wait many months before requesting an external, institutional military intervention would have been related to the "operationalization" of the vast corruption mentioned by the Chattam House: firstly, the benefits of a war economy over some members of the local military leadership. Indeed, as has been pointed out, 7,000 "ghost soldiers" were discovered in the Mozambican army in early 2022 (Hanlon, 2022a). Their salaries were being distributed to senior defense officials, fattening their pockets. A second reason would be

drug trafficking, which is particularly flourishing in Cabo Delgado. According to some observers, “this trade is believed to be highly beneficial to several in the President’s close circle.” An external, institutional-type intervention “could subject the government to external scrutiny” (Demuyne and Weijenberg, 2021). Finally, the Mozambican government wished to procrastinate the possible control that an institutional military intervention would also bring with respect to the lack of respect for human rights by an army that was in any case will-prepared and professionalized (Neethling, 2021): both against the prisoners of Ansar Al-Sunna and against the civilians themselves, as terrible videos have repeatedly shown on local social networks (Amnesty International, 2021).

Political reasons within SADC led the Mozambican government first to try to crush terrorism in Cabo Delgado with its own forces, then through the unobtrusive intervention of private military companies, such as Russia’s Wagner and South Africa’s DAG. Within the SADC, Mozambique began to accuse—implicitly or sometimes explicitly—its neighbors of facilitating the country’s destruction, because of its huge gas resources. The reference is to Tanzania, which is linked by historical relations of solidarity with Mozambique. Tanzania has been accused of favoring the Ansar Al-Sunna group by allowing its exponents to penetrate Cabo Delgado from the Tanzanian border. Indirect confirmation of Tanzania’s initially ambiguous role comes from the words of Mozambique’s defense minister, Cristovão Chume. In August, shortly before the signing of a bilateral agreement between the two countries on defense and security, Chume had to declare publicly that Tanzania had never hindered the fight against terrorism in Mozambique (Massingue, 2022). Even with Zimbabwe, the historical cooperation relationship has soured due to the civil war between Renamo and the Maputo government (which started again in 2013 and ended in 2019), prompting thousands of Mozambicans to seek refuge in neighboring Zimbabwe (Jakwa, 2017).

In parallel to this discourse of denial of external military intervention, as an alternative for tackling the problem, the government first opted for contracting private military companies operated by mercenaries, then regional military intervention.

It was only after much hesitation, perplexity over Maputo’s attitude, lack of funding from SADC to start the mission in Mozambique, that this organization decided to intervene militarily in Cabo Delgado.

This decision came “at the extraordinary summit of the heads of state and government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), held on 23 June 2021 in Maputo” (Deleglise, 2021). This summit also clarified the terms of reference, linked to the composition of the force (Table 1), duration and tasks of the mission.

At the outset the SADC military intervention mission in Cabo Delgado, had at its disposal 12 million dollars of which seven million dollars from the member states’ contribution and a further five million dollars from the SADC Emergency fund over a period of 3 months - 15 July to 15 October 2021. However, at a summit convened by the Republic of South Africa, which currently heads the Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation (OPDSC), held in Pretoria on 05 October 2021, it was decided to extend the SAMIM military mission in Mozambique for another 3 months, i.e., until January 2022. This decision was based on the argument that the joint force needed to clear the areas of confrontation and consolidate the victories over Ansar Al-Sunna.

The SADC military intervention in Cabo Delgado can imply a scenario of similar or more lethal terrorist attacks in the States of

TABLE 1 Composition of the SADC Mission in Mozambique—SAMIM.

Country	Effective (nr of militaries)	Observations
South Africa	1,495	Head of mission
Angola	20 + transport aircraft, crew and support staff	
Botswana	296	Chief deputy
DRC		
Lesotho	113	
Tanzania		
Zambia		
Malawi		
Zimbabwe	304 military instructors	

Source: The authors, based on SADC information.

the region that provided part of their military for this intervention and throughout the region in general. The attacks may come from the same group that has been making incursions in Cabo Delgado since October or from affiliated groups, given the solidarity that is a hallmark of these groups. On August 25, 2021, shortly after Tanzanian troops were sent to Cabo Delgado, a man “killed four people, three policemen and a security guard, and injured six people in a diplomatic neighborhood near the French embassy in the city of Dar es Salaam” (Reuters, 2021). The strengthening of regional solidarity in the face of this form of manifestation of political violence, which has shown itself to be forceful and with a strong capacity for mobilization and propagation, is another implication that may arise from this regional intervention.

A final reflection must be made on the effectiveness of the SADC intervention in Cabo Delgado. It should be recalled that shortly before the arrival of the SAMIM troops, the Rwandan army arrived in the field (on 9 July 2021), which caused yet another diplomatic incident between Mozambique and SADC. In the face of SADC’s stymied reaction, Maputo reiterated that it was its right to choose its partners freely, showing, once again, a clear lack of a common spirit of Sadnesses (Mugadi, 2021). Rwanda’s intervention was also explained by Maputo through the existence of a Memorandum of Understanding, dating back to 2018, on defense and security, which legitimized the entry of Rwandan army in Cabo Delgado. This agreement has been strengthened in 2022, with a new deal signed by the two Chief of Army Staff, Bosco Kazura for Rwanda, and his Mozambican colleague Joaquim Rivas Mangrassa (Coezee-Swart, 2022). The rather modest results obtained by the joint—or, it would be better to say, simply contextual—military intervention of SAMIM and Rwanda (except for the securing of the area close to Total’s investment, the one between Palma and Mocimboa da Praia) must also be explained by the original diplomatic incident mentioned above. Relations between SADC and Rwanda have never been excellent: the alleged assassinations ordered by Kagame in Southern Africa of his dissidents (later repeated in Mozambique), as well as Kigali’s attitude in the DRC affair. Here, Kagame’s role seems clear: support for the paramilitary group M23 in order to destabilize Congo on its eastern front by exploiting its enormous natural wealth (Schneider, 2012). Today this position has been shared also by Robert Woods, the United States Alternate Representative to the United Nations for Political Affairs, in response to the request

coming from the RDC government, which called for sanctions against Kigali (Etahoben, 2022).

Levels of communication between the two armies have always been low, if any, demonstrating that SADC and Rwanda's anti-terrorist action has different objectives (Louw-Vaudran, 2022). On the SADC side, the main objective is to prevent terrorism from spreading to other countries, as has already happened in Tanzania and to some extent in South Africa. On the Rwandan side, it seems that Kagame intends to have the green light to persecute his country's political dissidents exiled in Mozambique, as the episodes of the journalist Ntamuhanga Cassien (LUSA, 2021), or the ex-military Karemangingo Revocat (Issufo, 2021) show; just as there is a clear desire to re-propose Rwanda as a global African player, in the wake of what was done in the Central African Republic in December 2020, by passing any prospect of multilateral intervention (e.g., through the African Union), and favoring bilateral logic (Coezee-Swart, 2022). Finally, the military successes of Kigali's troops in the three districts of Cabo Delgado in which they are engaged (Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia and Palma) may soon turn into economic interests. In any case, on 1 December 2022, the European Union allocated new aid for counter-terrorism support in Cabo Delgado, with a budget of EUR 20 million for Kagame to send additional contingents of the Rwandan army (LUSA, 2022). This is an explicit acknowledgment of Rwanda's role in the fight against terrorism in Cabo Delgado, much to the chagrin of the SADC and its SAMIM mission, which continues to struggle with internal problems, poor efficiency and weak military action.

Conclusions

Terrorism in Mozambique seems to have deep roots, as in the case of Somalia and the Sahel. In the case of Mozambique historical inequalities among the various peoples of the North of the country have not been interpreted by Mozambican State as well as by international community as an issue to be solved through a political, inclusive approach. Thus, the military intervention of Rwanda and SADC was interpreted by the local populations as a mere attempt to give a military solution to a critical, historical situation. In addition, the contrasts among Mozambican government and Rwanda from one side, SADC from the other side made this situation worse, in terms of a military, integrated approach on the field.

The Mozambican government initially contracted private military companies operated by mercenaries, albeit in an unspoken manner. In this exercise, it became clear that this alternative approach failed to prevent the attacks and their continuation.

Resorting to the most logical option, that of SADC, was therefore a "plan B" on Maputo's part. The Mozambican government, however, played on two tables, that of Rwanda and that of SADC, favoring the former and posing rather serious problems in its relations with SADC itself. The lack of coordination of the two armies, as well as of the various intelligence services of the SADC countries and of

these with Rwanda contributed to the partial failure of the military mission. A mission that saw parallel interventions by two different armies, never integrated into a common strategy. Internationally, the European Union funded both SAMIM and Rwanda. However, with the latest decision taken, the scales seem to have fallen in favor of Rwanda, probably due to French influence, which has obvious common interests with Kigali in the energy game being played in Mozambique. On the other hand, for too much time SADC lived in the illusion that its region was an oasis in an African continent threatened by Jihadist terrorism; an illusion that provoked enormous delays at the political as well as at the military level.

It is difficult to predict future scenarios. However, what is emerging at this stage is a relative securing of energy production facilities in Cabo Delgado, but with an expansion of terrorist attacks to other districts and even other provinces, as was the case first in Niassa, then in Nampula. And also, toward other countries in the region: a concern that Kigali certainly does not have.

The other result is that the SADC does not seem to strength its role in Africa from this complex affair. The process of SADCization seems to be far away from the desires of who thinks that only strengthening transnational organizations in Africa is possible to face issues as terrorism, poverty, economic development. In spite of joint efforts, in fact, the meager military results and the still-to-be-built coordination within SAMIM in Mozambique suggest a weak political role for SADC, to the benefit of bilateral relations on the African continent, as well as international relations, for example with the European Union or other partners outside Africa.

Author contributions

LB: theoretical framework of the article and historical analysis. EC: theoretical framework, military perspective, and methodology. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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