

# SADC's complex task in Mozambique's Insurgency

Last week, Zimbabwe's President and current chair of the Southern Development African Community's (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, Emmerson Mnangagwa met his counterpart, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi in Chimoio, Mozambique to deliberate on the security situation in Cabo Delgado and parts of Manica and Sofala provinces, which have been hit by terrorist attacks.

In recent months, there have been reports of disturbances by terrorist militants in Mozambique, which pose a headache not only for Mozambique but for the entire SADC region that is generally not accustomed to such security problems.

The attacks on Mocímboa da Praia are curious, given its importance as a logistical hub for Cabo Delgado, a strategic economic artery bearing key [gas projects](#) vital for Mozambique's national economic survival. Last month, a government military operation killed 129 insurgents in [Muidumbe, Quirimba and Ibo Island](#).

Despite government's efforts to thwart the insurgency, there is no doubt that the actions of the militants have a destabilising effect on a country that has reeled from decades-old banditry of the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO) that endangered the peace and security SADC has enjoyed over the years.

That a critical security discussion of this nature took place in Chimoio, which is the capital of Manica Province, at a time the world is grappling with Covid-19 underpins the importance of the visit and the seriousness of the situation.

Mnangagwa's visit was a testimony of an undying relationship commonly driven by shared anti-colonialism struggles. Although

Mnangagwa went to Mozambique wearing the bigger hat of the symbolic chairmanship of the region's security architecture, he was nonetheless guided by Zimbabwe's security interests, arising from the threats posed by insurgencies occurring a hundred kilometres away.

Zimbabwe's security interests would explain claims of Harare having "[clandestinely deployed](#)" its troops, something which the government has vehemently denied despite the [insistence from the press in Harare](#).

As a sovereign nation, Mozambican institutions such as the army should ordinarily have the wherewithal to deal with problems of that nature. But hardly a year after President Filipe Nyusi signed a peace agreement with RENAMO, the country's security establishment is yet grappling with heightened unconventional attacks posing risks to citizens, businesses and regional integration.

Mozambique is strategically located, bordering Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. This geographical reality centrally posits the terrorist militant groups potential to spread to the entirety of SADC, which has been the most peaceful region across the continent.

For individual member states or even SADC as an entity, there is no doubt that any actions on the Mozambican situation will be guided by two competing motivations of balancing security dynamics and solidarity politics, which have characterised relations between the former liberation movements within the region.

Juxtaposing the security and solidarity dimensions of likely interventions to contain the terrorist insurgency in the region requires a historical understanding of the wartime bonds between the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO)'s relationship with the African National Congress (ANC), ZANU and even the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO).

Mozambique's attainment of independence in 1975 benefitted hugely from key support from Tanzania and Zambia both of which had gained self-rule in 1961 and 1964 respectively. The existence of independent states across the region, therefore, has an organic link to wartime bonds which have continued to date, although under everchanging political dynamics.

The temptation to respond to the Mozambican situation on purely solidarity basis will likely guide Namibia and Zimbabwe, who gained independence through the instrumental support from FRELIMO under the leadership of Samora Machel.

For South Africa, which achieved black majority rule in 1994, there is a sufficient reason to believe that its response to the crisis in Mozambique will follow the solidarity path similar to its "sibling" countries of Namibia and Zimbabwe.

The Daily Maverick describes the response of Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa's President, to the Mozambican conflict as "dangerous silence" to in a conflict "which poses a serious threat to regional stability".

Despite the existing colonial-era warm relations coupled with Pretoria's support for the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between FRELIMO and RENAMO in August 2019, claims have, however, been made of "existing bad blood" between Pretoria and Maputo.

The Online Investigative publication A Carta (The Letter) alleges that Mozambique engaged a private security company in South Duck Advisory Group (DAG) seeking the "deployment of services" from the company without the knowledge of Pretoria.

To base South Africa's "quietness" regarding the Mozambican conflict on account Mozambique's alleged disregard for diplomatic communications and protocol appears disingenuous considering the extent of the problem and the existing camaraderie between the two nations and generally most nations across the region.

South Africa's foreign policy exudes the Pan-African outlook of cooperation and solidarity but is however measured in response even during times of crisis.

This foreign policy outlook would explain why South Africa did not take part in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) War of 1998, at a time Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola had entered an alliance.

Although Mnangagwa has already discussed the idea of setting up a troika meeting with DRC and Lesotho among other states possibly after the Covid-19 situation, South Africa's voice as a regional and continental powerhouse remains. President Ramaphosa's current chairmanship of the African Union (AU) gives him a latitude of agency to a Mozambican problem with ramifications for regional security and integration.

The Mozambican conflict is intriguing. Despite the existing solidarity amongst member states, it is however infantile to allow colonial-time sentiments to colour responses to the crisis. With the exception of Eswatini, all SADC member states have seen leadership changes in the past ten years.

Robert Mugabe, who was a torchbearer of the region and one of the longest-serving leaders across the continent was removed via a military coup in 2017.

In SADC's bid to devise an appropriate response to Mozambique's conflict, there is a reminder of how the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, which was formed in 1996 has been redefined by time and changing leadership personalities within the region, over the years.

While Mnangagwa, Ramaphosa and Namibia's President Hage Geingob have war credentials as successors to their predecessors who played frontline roles in their respective states, the current crop of leaders however lack a strong rallying point and regional leadership to galvanise some collective support for Mozambique on solidarity lines.

The SADC of today is different from that of 20 years ago. In the absence of Robert Mugabe who was of the same generation as the former Namibian President Sam Nujoma, SADC's tangible memory of the liberation ethos seems to be waning.

The absence of Robert Mugabe, who wielded monumental influence within the region as a vanguard of Pan-Africanism, now exposes SADC's individual leanings. Although most SADC member states chant slogans about solidarity and integration, they seem to lack the same resolve of the Mugabe-era to materialise rhetoric, nay actions, even in time of need.

Though South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, which are the youngest nations within SADC, are still ruled by leaders with liberation war credentials, the current crop however lacks the sentimentality and collectivism to solve security problems having a bearing on regional and continental integration.

Beyond the contribution of leadership to the conflict, SADC is however faced by another problem of a security threat which embodies asymmetric warfare.

Any deployment by member states working under the auspices of the SADC security architecture, is risky given the possibility of retaliatory attacks, as has been seen in [countless examples world over.](#)

Unlike other sub-regional groups such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC) and even the Arab League, SADC does not have a strong precedent to inform responses to the insurgency.

The example of Kenya's intervention in Somalia, with a clear intention to reassert regional security is a classic example, especially following the subsequent terror attack of the Westgate shopping mall in Kenya in 2013.

In the end, past political experiences and obtaining situations should inform the mechanisms and responses by

individual member states prior to SADC directives.

It would appear that the only nation with a rooted experience with terror attacks within the region is Tanzania, following the bombings of the United States embassy in Dar es Salaam in 1998.

Even with the threats posed by the insurgents posed along the Mozambique-Tanzania borderline areas, which have seen Islamist forces executing six villagers, President John Magufuli has swiftly deployed security personnel to safeguard national security.

As a member to both SADC and the East Africa Community (EAC), Tanzania is fully aware of its strategic importance which it requires to show as part of efforts towards safeguarding the regional security for the two blocs.

The developing security situation in Mozambique therefore requires SADC member states to balance solidarity and security politics. The underpinnings of individual state interests in any response are quite apparent. However, one thing is clear: Mozambique and SADC are not dealing with a conventional problem, which means that it requires a great deal of tact.