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Actor Profile: Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF)

Cabo Ligado — or 'connected cape' — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and MediaFax.

INTRODUCTION

Tanzania is the only country with a land border with Cabo Delgado province. Despite this, its response to the conflict has always been restrained. This was clear under President John Magufuli, whose view was that the conflict was a problem for Mozambique to solve. Though considerably more engaged under his successor President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania's approach remains restrained, focused on advancing Tanzania's security interests.

The Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF) has been directly engaged in operations against Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) in Cabo Delgado's Nangade district through the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) since July 2021 and separately through a bilateral agreement with Mozambique since October 2022. With SAMIM set to have fully withdrawn by July 2024, the TPDF will remain in Mozambique, making Tanzania a significant party to counter-insurgency and stabilization operations in the future.¹ This actor profile begins by introducing Tanzania's historical involvement in Mozambique. It then examines the political imperatives that initially prevented the TPDF's direct engagement in the Cabo Delgado conflict before a change in the presidency ushered in a more interventionist approach.

TANZANIA IN MOZAMBIQUE: A LONG HISTORY

Tanzania's military engagement in Mozambique predates Mozambican independence in 1975. Frelimo was founded in Dar es Salaam in 1962, with its military operations run from camps in southern Tanzania for years during the Mozambican War of Independence.² From 1975-1980, the TPDF was deployed in Tete, Gaza, and Manica provinces against forces from Rhodesia.³ TPDF Troops were again deployed from 1986-1988 against Renamo in Mozambique's civil war.⁴

Tanzania's engagement in Mozambique at this time was not exceptional. Indeed, Tanzania led the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee that supported liberation movements across southern Africa.⁵ The legacy of this is Tanzania's membership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). From the 1990s onwards, Tanzania's foreign policy was characterized by consistent involvement in conflict resolution mechanisms. The most prominent of these was in Burundi. Tanzania was also engaged

¹ Paul Owere, 'Why Tanzanian troops will remain in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado,' *The Citizen*, 6 May 2024

² George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam*, Cambridge University Press, 2022

³ Jamhuri and Ntemihonda <https://www.jamhurimedia.co.tz/jwtz-wasogea-mpakani/>

⁴ <http://blog.ikulu.go.tz/?m=20140906>

⁵ George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam*, Cambridge University Press, 2022

in the peace process in Mozambique, with Tanzania's former President Jakaya Kikwete, then retired, having a role in the process that led to General Peace Agreement of 2019. However, given his successor Magufuli's lack of interest in intervention in the conflict, his role was not central.⁶

After succeeding President Kikwete in 2015, President Magufuli took a more isolationist approach to foreign policy, rarely traveling overseas and prioritizing domestic issues over regional or international engagement.⁷ This isolationist approach shaped Tanzania's relationship with Mozambique, particularly in the early years of the conflict from 2017 to President Magufuli's death in 2021.

TANZANIA AND THE INSURGENCY

Tanzania's approach to the conflict pivoted in 2021 with the death of President Magufuli and his succession by President Samia. The TPDF was central to her succession, ensuring that the constitutional procedure for replacing a deceased president was followed to bring her to office. However, while her coming to office soon saw TPDF deployment through SAMIM, as well as bilaterally, Tanzania's posture toward the conflict has always been shaped by the presidency's interpretation of domestic interests.

FROM ISOLATION TO RE-ENGAGEMENT

When the Cabo Delgado insurgency started in October 2017, it was clear to the Tanzanian authorities that it presented a security threat to Tanzania. A similar insurgency in Tanzania's Pwani region had been put down that year, the leaders of which had fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique.⁸ Tanzania had for some years been dealing with networks of recruitment and logistical support connected to armed jihadist groups across East Africa, as well as armed groups within the country.⁹ By January 2018, Tanzania's police had agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding with the Police of the Republic of Mozambique to work together on joint operations and intelligence sharing.

The direct impact of the insurgency on Tanzania, however, has not been significant. The first confirmed action by Mozambican insurgents in Tanzania did not come until 2019, and this did not presage any significant campaign. ACLED records just 13 attacks linked to the Mozambique insurgency from 2019 to 2022, and none since.

TPDF's first engagement with the insurgents came in this period when the group attacked the border town of Kitaya on 14 October 2020. The insurgents engaged directly with TPDF, which had recently established a base outside the town to strengthen border security. At least 20 civilians died in the attack, and up to three TPDF soldiers. The Kitaya attack happened two weeks before elections that would give President Magufuli a second five-year term in office. A video clip released by the insurgents showed one fighter stating "we have come to remove Magufuli," before tearing up an election poster bearing his portrait.

By this stage, Tanzania had considerably strengthened security along the border. This was undertaken with some consultation with Mozambique, though contact between President Magufuli and President Filipe Nyusi had by that point been by telephone only. The two had agreed in July 2020 to strengthen coordination on security, though even following the October attack, there was no substantive change in security posture

⁶ Rui Saraiva, 'Peacemaking from Within: Adaptive Mediation of Direct Dialogue in Mozambique's New Peace Process (2013–2019),' in Cedric de Coning, Ako Muto, Rui Saraiva, *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peace-making in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria*, Springer International Publishing, 2022

⁷ Nicodemus Minde, 'The Waning Foreign Policy Influence Under President Magufuli,' Social Science Research Council, 26 March 2019

⁸ The Islamic State in East Africa, The European Institute of Peace, September 2018

⁹ Peter Bofin, 'Tanzania and the Political Containment of Terror,' Hudson Institute, 24 January 2022

from Tanzania. Another Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the countries' police forces, and the two presidents met in Tanzania in January 2021.¹⁰ In contrast, President Nyusi had already met face-to-face with Rwanda's President Paul Kagame twice since the insurgency had begun. President Magufuli was adamant that the insurgency was a Mozambican problem that Mozambique had to solve.¹¹

Less than three months after Nyusi's January 2021 meeting with President Magufuli, Magufuli was dead, replaced by then Vice-President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who was sworn in as president on 19 March 2021. Her presidency saw a significant shift in Tanzania's engagement with the conflict in northern Mozambique.

TPDF'S RETURN TO MOZAMBIQUE

The TPDF had considerable influence on President Samia coming to office. The then Chief of Defence Forces General Venance Mabeyo, in an account of her transition to power suggested that there were efforts from within the ruling party to prevent her from being sworn-in as president, but that he was instrumental in resisting this. These efforts allegedly delayed her swearing-in by two days.¹² Within 18 months of her being sworn in, Tanzania's relations with Mozambique had changed considerably, with the TPDF at the center of those changes, initially through participation in the SADC intervention and later through the deployment of a bilateral force that remains in the country.

On 8 April 2021, less than three weeks after she assumed the presidency, Tanzania participated in the SADC Heads of State Summit that set the process in place for the deployment of a SADC Standby Force, that would later be known as SAMIM, to be deployed in July of that year.¹³ Tanzania contributed 277 troops to SAMIM's initial deployment of 738, making it one of the two largest contributing countries, alongside South Africa.¹⁴ Tanzania's troops were deployed to Nangade district, serving alongside troops from Lesotho.

In October 2022, a separate deployment of 300 troops to Nangade district was made under a subsequent bilateral arrangement with Mozambique. This came one month after President Samia visited Maputo to attend Frelimo's annual conference, celebrating 60 years since the party's foundation in Dar es Salaam.¹⁵ During the trip, a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation was signed.¹⁶ This was the culmination of preparatory diplomatic work that included a meeting of the two countries' foreign ministers in Maputo in August, and their chiefs of defense forces in Dar es Salaam in September.¹⁷

It was not until January 2024 that President Samia made a clear, if short, statement of strategic priorities for Tanzania's involvement in Cabo Delgado. These issues included the threat to Tanzania from non-state armed groups in Cabo Delgado and elsewhere in the region, particularly those with recruits from Tanzania, and the destabilizing impact of refugee flows from conflicts in neighboring countries. She also pointed to the presence of Rwandan forces in Cabo Delgado, circumspectly referring to "a foreign force which is beside our border."

¹⁰ [Government of Mozambique, 'PR interage com homólogo da República da Tanzania,' Portal of the Government of Mozambique, 2 July 2020](#)

¹¹ [Erick Kabendera, 'President Samia in Maputo,' in Cabo Ligado Monthly: September 2022, ACLED 17 October 2022](#)

¹² ['JENERALI MABEYO AFUNGUKA A TO Z KIFO CHA RAIS MAGUFULI,' Daily News Digital, 16 March 2024](#)

¹³ [SADC, 'Communique of the Extraordinary Double Troika Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community \(SADC\),' 8 April 2021](#)

¹⁴ ['Missão da SADC em Cabo Delgado inicia com 738 soldados e 19 peritos,' Carta de Mocambique, 10 August 2021](#)

¹⁵ ['Mozambique's Frelimo opens 12th congress with Samia Suluhu Hassan as guest of honour,' Xinhua News, 24 September 2022](#)

¹⁶ <https://x.com/ikulumawasliano/status/1572630042236145664>

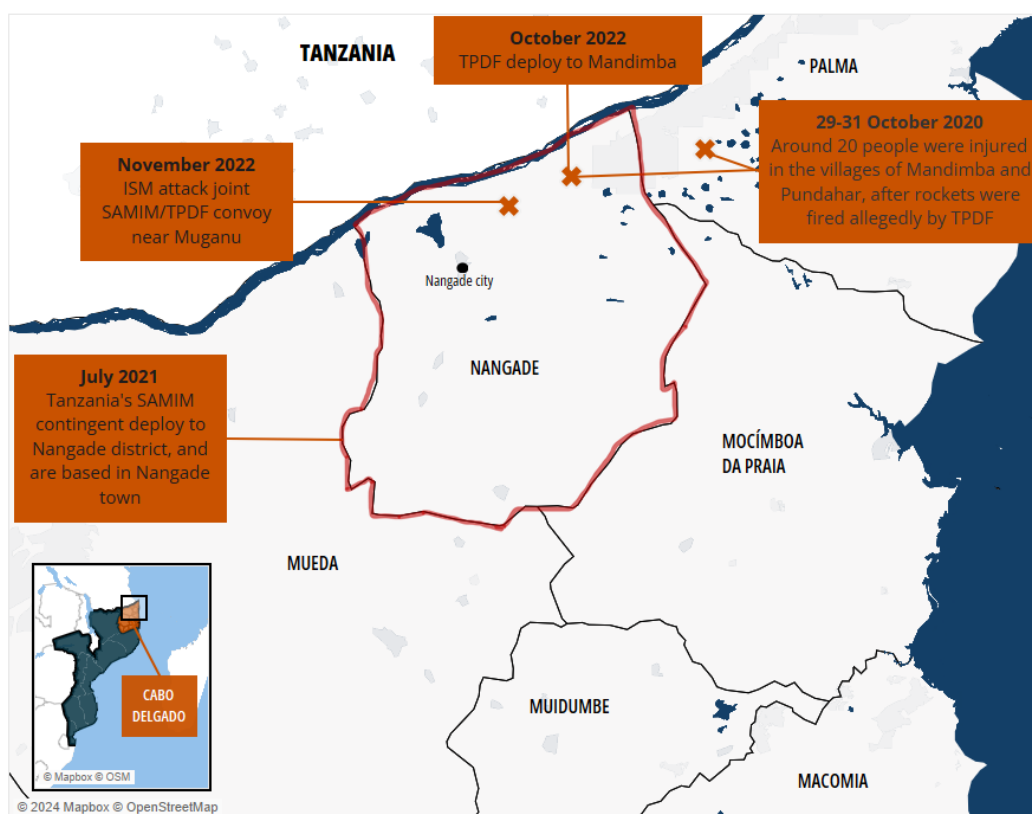
¹⁷ ['Moçambique e Tanzânia reforçam cooperação nos domínios da defesa e segurança,' Rádio Mocambique, 5 August 2022; 'Mkuu wa Majeshi ya Msumbiji atembeleza Tanzania,' TPDF, 6 September 2022](#)

TPDF OPERATIONS IN CABO DELGADO

The TPDF's operations in Mozambique have been limited, reflecting President Samia's strategic priorities as set out in January 2024. Tanzania's engagement has primarily focused on preventing the conflict from spilling over the border, dictating the TPDF's geographic deployment in the north of Cabo Delgado. It has also had politically strategic aims, in countering the Rwandan presence and bolstering relationships with an old ally, Mozambique, that had deteriorated under President Magufuli.

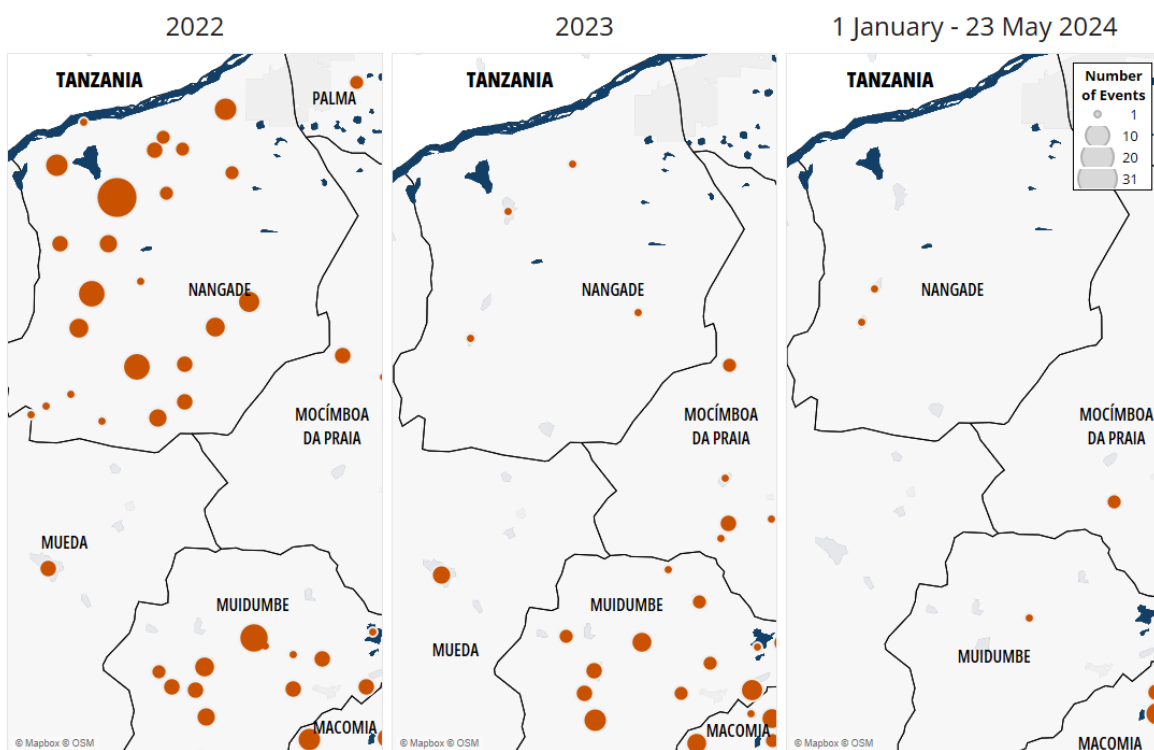
Prior to involvement with SAMIM, ACLED records shelling, likely mortar or rocket fire, from Tanzania towards villages close to Mandimba in Nangade district in October 2020, injuring some civilians. Subsequent to SAMIM deployment, Disentangling the actions of SAMIM's Tanzania contingent from that of the TPDF bilateral deployment is difficult.

TPDF Presence Along the Tanzanian Border in Cabo Delgado



However, it is clear that SAMIM, alongside the TPDF, has had considerable success in Nangade district in 2022 (*see map above*). Following the deployment of the bilateral force in October 2022 in Mandimba in Nangade district, joint operations with Mozambican forces in November of 2022 successfully [targeted ISM hideouts](#) in the district, leading to the death, surrender, or flight of ISM fighters. The success of SAMIM and the TPDF bilateral force over that time is seen in the reduction of ISM activity in the district. ISM was involved in 116 incidents in Nangade in 2022 according to ACLED data. In 2023, this fell to just four (*see map below*). ACLED records just one successful operation by ISM against these forces. On 15 November 2022, Islamist militia ambushed a convoy of SAMIM forces, including Mozambican and Tanzanian forces, near the village of Muganu (Nangade, Cabo Delgado) with rocket-propelled grenades. Five Tanzanian soldiers were injured. In 2024, there have been just two minor incidents in the district up to mid-May.

ISM Involvement in Political Violence in Nangade and Surroundings



PROSPECTS

The TPDF is likely to remain focused on maintaining border security and is, therefore, unlikely to extend its deployment beyond Nangade district. This reflects Tanzania's strategic priority of contributing to stability that will prevent either spillover of the conflict into Tanzania or any significant flow of refugees into Tanzania. Joint operations will involve collaboration with Mozambique's Defense and Security Forces (FDS), including the Local Force, which is well-developed in Nangade district.

The extent of its commitment will also be driven to some extent by budget. Tanzania has also contributed troops to the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the 2023/2024 financial year, commitments in Mozambique and DRC, as well as other unspecified financial demands, led to Tanzania's Ministry of Defence requiring a supplementary budget of over 1.6 trillion Tanzanian shillings. It is unclear whether such budgetary implications will be sustainable.

Currently, Tanzania's commitment to deployment in Mozambique is not time-limited. The length of its commitment will depend on the success of counterinsurgency operations undertaken by Mozambique's FDS and the Rwandan Security Forces (RSF). While there is some suspicion of Rwanda's presence, as expressed by President Samia in January 2024, both forces now depend on each other, with RSF troop numbers increasing to fill the gap left by departing SAMIM troops.¹⁸ While joint operations between these forces remain unlikely, the TPDF will rely on RSF to prevent the dispersal of ISM northwards into Nangade district.

¹⁸ ['Why Rwanda is bolstering forces in Mozambique,' The New Times, 27 May 2024](#)